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The Jewish Understanding of the Scriptural Solomon Narrative:
Examining Biblical, Classical Rabbinic, and Major Medieval Responses

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

by

Sheila Tuller Keiter

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Jewish Understanding of the Scriptural Solomon Narrative:
Examining Biblical, Classical Rabbinic, and Major Medieval Responses

by

Sheila Tuller Keiter

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Carol Ann Bakhos, Chair

The biblical Solomon narrative that appears in the Book of Kings offers a complex portrait of Solomon as both the wise Temple builder as well as an idolatrous sinner. Solomon's story poses the problem of how the wisest of all men to whom God spoke could have come to worship other gods. Over history, Jewish literature has had to contend with Solomon's mixed legacy. It has done so by either ignoring the difficult aspects of his narrative, by apologizing for Solomon's conduct, or by criticizing him for his errors. Even within Tanakh, we see multiple and disparate responses to the Solomonic problem presented in Kings. Chronicles offers a cleansed portrait of Solomon, focusing on his role as Temple builder. Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, both attributed to Solomon, play a large role in the evolution of Solomon's character in Jewish thought. Arguably they were written as critiques of Solomon, of his arrogant reliance on wisdom and his failure to maintain faith in God. Yet this purpose seems to have been lost by the

time of the rabbis of late antiquity. Instead, the rabbis designate these works, which they presume to have been written by Solomon, as divinely inspired. This in turn ultimately establishes a basis on which to redeem Solomon, the rabbis construing his works as expressions of penitence. Solomon's prophetic status is amplified by the targumic treatment of those works. The popularity of the Targum to the Song of Songs and its use by Rashi in his commentary to the Song, granting its ideas even greater circulation, promoted a highly laudatory reading of Solomon in the Middle Ages. In addition, admiring portrayals of Solomon in Christianity and Islam may have influenced Jewish perceptions. These factors made castigation of Solomon increasingly difficult for the Jewish medieval exegetes. Thus, an apologetic image of Solomon gains ascendance in the Middle Ages which has colored Jewish perceptions of Solomon ever since. As such, we see Jewish exegesis responding to its own theological needs as well as responding to external exegetical influences.

The dissertation of Sheila Tuller Keiter is approved.

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2018

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Challenges Posed by Solomon

My first consciousness of King Solomon came when I was five years old and graduating from Jewish pre-school. Our class performed a dramatic interpretation of the story of King Solomon and the Bee. In this tale, Solomon is stung by a bee and seeks to kill the offending insect in revenge. The bee pleads for its life, offering to help Solomon at some unspecified future time. Solomon, skeptical but amused by the offer, spares the bee. Of course, the bee is able to deliver on its promise. When the Queen of Sheba, as part of her series of riddles, asks Solomon to identify the one real flower among hundreds of artificial blooms, the bee immediately sniffs out the genuine flower and surreptitiously informs Solomon of its location. Solomon's reputation for wisdom remains intact, and the preschoolers learn a lesson about the value of even the smallest of God's creatures.

I recall, perhaps six years later, discussing the wisdom of Solomon's decision in the case of the disputed baby. It was a tale I knew from children's bible stories. We were challenged to think about whether Solomon's solution, cutting the baby in half, was the right decision. We discussed whether we thought Solomon would have actually cut the baby in half. This seemed unlikely. We also discussed how the two disputing mothers responded to the idea and how only the real mother would have forgone her rights to the baby rather than see him killed. My sixth grade self marveled at Solomon's boldness, his creative problem-solving, and his brilliant psychological insight. My image of Solomon was of a good, wise king who meted out superior justice for his subjects through dint of his creative genius.

I do not remember when I first encountered the Book of Kings, perhaps some time in high school or very young adulthood. I do recall an odd sense of delight when I read of how Solomon turned to idol worship and was punished with the loss of the northern kingdom. Perhaps I should have been shocked or saddened, but I was not. Instead, I thrilled at the knowledge that I had stumbled upon a deep, dark, shameful secret that had been hidden from those who had never progressed beyond Bible Stories for Children. The great Solomon was not so great after all, and now I was one of the insiders who knew just how failed he was. Solomon did not make a few honest mistakes. Nor was he a well-meaning but ineffective monarch. He was a sinner in the worst sense of the term. He had committed the cardinal sin of idolatry.

Over time, the disparity between the Solomon of legend and the Solomon of Kings became increasingly troubling. If Solomon was so wise, how could he so easily turn to idolatry? This is a classic question that has plagued exegetes for centuries. Among biblical figures, Solomon has been subject to unusual adaptation. He is beset by contradictions. His sins stand in sharp contrast to his divine wisdom and his achievement of building God's Temple.¹ This dissertation will address many of the historical responses or non-responses to this question. However, there is a larger question that is the primary focus of this work. If Solomon sinned and was a failed king, why is he celebrated today as a model wise king and the hero of children's stories? Why is Solomon's sinfulness so often hidden and suppressed? Despite Solomon's sins and his downfall, he remains a symbol of Jewish power and creativity that fed upon the imagination of Israel long after the text of Kings buried him.² How did this happen?

¹ Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2.

² Walter Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 23.

This dissertation will examine exegetical responses to the Solomon narrative as it is first laid out in the Book of Kings and the problems it poses. Solomon makes multiple appearances in Tanakh outside of Kings. We will examine these biblical treatments of Solomon and how they respond to the problematic Solomon of Kings. We will pay special attention to the three biblical books that feature Solomonic attribution and discuss Solomon's role in those works. We will discuss the role Solomon plays in the canonicity of those same biblical works and how their acceptance as holy writings influenced attitudes toward Solomon. We will also examine Solomon's depiction in Second Temple literature as well as in early Christian writings and the development of popular legends about Solomon. This discussion will bring us to an examination of rabbinic attitudes toward Solomon in late antiquity as revealed through rabbinic aggadic midrash. We will also examine treatments of Solomon in the targumim, the Aramaic translations of biblical works that were written and utilized in late antiquity and into the early Middle Ages. In this discussion we will also examine the similarity of traditions regarding Solomon in targumic literature and the Qur'an as well as the role Solomon plays in Islamic thought. Finally, we will examine the treatment of Solomon in the commentaries of the classical Jewish medieval exegetes. This dissertation hopes to map out the progression of Jewish attitudes toward Solomon through the different Jewish literary responses to him and to demonstrate how these works as well as historical circumstances serve to influence subsequent sources in their evaluation of Solomon. In so doing, the dissertation will also reflect on the development of Jewish exegetical strategies from biblical to medieval times.

Throughout all of the texts we will examine, Solomon evokes both criticism and apology. However, the motivations for these critiques and defenses vary from source to source and from time period to time period. As we will see, there are many reasons why Jewish sources choose to

shield Solomon, and these reasons do not always stem from a reflexive need to defend national pride. We will also note disparate defensive approaches toward Solomon. Some texts whitewash Solomon's career, while others engage in apologetics. By "whitewashing," I refer to treatments of Solomon that willfully ignore his problematic nature and portray him in idealized terms without responding to his flaws. Apologetics, on the other hand, necessarily recognize that their subject requires apology. Historically, "apology" did not mean admission of wrongdoing, but rather a denial of wrongdoing and justification for questionable conduct. Apologetics, as employed by many of the sources discussed in this dissertation, refers to attempts to restore or repair a person's reputation in light of public debacle.³ We will encounter both whitewashing and apologetics with respect to Solomon.

The dissertation, while examining several different responses to Solomon that have been produced over the ages, will try to establish a portrait of the evolution of Jewish attitudes toward Solomon over time. We will examine the evaluation of Solomon in each work we examine, but we will also attempt to establish how those evaluations coexisted with each other, which traditions emerged ascendant, and which faded in significance despite their endurance in Jewish literature. In this sense, the dissertation serves as a reception history of Jewish attitudes toward Solomon as reflected in biblical and exegetical works through Jewish history. Thus, the dissertation will also more generally offer analysis on the evolution of Jewish exegetical strategies over the centuries through the specific lens of Solomon. As a result, this dissertation offers a two-pronged contribution to scholarship, examining not only the reception history of Jewish understandings of Solomon but the development and progression of Jewish scriptural exegesis as well. There are many scholarly works that deal with the Solomon of the Bible.

³ Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 16.

There is no end to the making of books about Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. There are numerous academic treatments of rabbinic literature, a fair number evaluating Solomon's treatment by the rabbis of late antiquity. And there is plenty of scholarly research on Solomon's treatment by the Jewish commentators of the Middle Ages. However, this work seeks to make a unique scholarly contribution in that it will trace the single topic of Solomon through these literary periods and identify the process by which it took the shape it did. Through the course of this dissertation we will follow a single ripple as it progresses through the pond of Jewish literature, enhancing scholarly understanding not only of Solomon but of the evolution of Jewish exegesis as a whole.

1.2 Methodology

The intent of this dissertation is to trace Jewish exegetical responses to Solomon from the Bible through the Middle Ages and to examine the development of Jewish exegesis in the process. As such, the dissertation is structured around the primary sources that discuss Solomon. As the dissertation examines each of these sources, it will reflect on scholarly analyses of the role Solomon plays in those works. The focus of our analysis will be on the literary aspects of the Solomon narrative. This dissertation is not interested in the historical truth of the Solomon narrative. Rather, the dissertation seeks to track and examine Jewish perceptions of Solomon, regardless of whether such a person really existed.

Because the primary description of King Solomon emerges from the Book of Kings, the Solomon narrative contained therein will be the touchstone against which other texts must be compared. This assumption requires establishing that the Book of Kings is indeed the oldest and original scriptural source for the Solomon narrative. Therefore, the dissertation will briefly

address authorship and composition dates as well as scholarly consensus regarding the relative order of composition for the various biblical sources invoking Solomon. The primary object of this discussion is to establish which texts are responding to which. The authorship of biblical texts is less essential to this project except to the extent that authorship offers insight into the motivations for a particular portrayal of Solomon. Therefore, less attention will be paid to the compositional history of biblical works except to examine scholarly research that impacts on the portrayal of Solomon. For example, many scholars see evidence of multiple redaction levels to the Book of Kings, with those varying levels of material reflecting varying points of view regarding Solomon.

Once the Book of Kings is satisfactorily established as the primary biblical source of the Solomon narrative, the dissertation will examine the Book of Kings' description of Solomon with an eye to its positive and negative portrayals of the Israelite king. The dissertation will focus on the literal sense of the narrative as well as to literary allusions made to other biblical texts. For example the Solomon narrative in Kings makes deliberate literary allusions to the kingly prohibitions listed in Deuteronomy 17. Therefore, the relationship between the two texts will be explored along with theories regarding how they are related. The dissertation will also explore the literary relationship between the Solomon narrative in Kings and Samuel's description of the abusive king in 1 Samuel 8. The analysis of Kings will also rely heavily on literary analysis of language in Kings itself, with an examination of word play, structural organization, and literary allusion within the Solomon narrative. All of these features will be examined in an effort to extract a literary view of Solomon, either as a pastiche of multiple views or as a comprehensive portrait that emerges from the text of Kings. The dissertation will

demonstrate that the Solomon of Kings emerges as a complex figure who elicits both positive and negative responses, while posing compelling theological challenges.

With regard to subsequent biblical texts featuring Solomon, these will be compared to the original narrative in Kings to determine in what ways they reference, follow, or diverge from the original. By identifying the similarities and differences between these texts and Kings, the dissertation will attempt to discern to which aspects of the Solomon narrative the later text is responding and to what extent it addresses the challenges his narrative poses. The most prominent biblical treatment of Solomon outside the Book of Kings appears in Chronicles. Once we establish that Chronicles postdates Kings and makes use of the Solomon narrative from Kings as a primary source, we will examine which elements of the story Chronicles omits, alters, or embellishes. These changes from Kings will help to reveal the Chronicler's attitudes toward Solomon. This analysis will also provide clues to the Chronicler's motivation for the changes he applies to his Solomon narrative. Since biblical texts tend not to state their literary intent, we will also turn to historical context to help determine the Chronicler's motivation in presenting a more cleansed version of the Solomon narrative.

Identifying the possible motives for any particular treatment of Solomon, while never certain, is important. A text may defend or criticize Solomon for reasons that are unique to that source's time and place. Changing traditions often reveal disparate interests and concerns. When historical conditions change or disappear, the rationale behind that work's interpretive understanding of Solomon may also disappear. Other texts may find resonance in the exegesis of later interpreters. In addition, it is possible that what a text originally intended and its literary purpose can be lost to history, and subsequent readings of a work can construe its intent differently. In such a case, earlier works can be repurposed for completely different exegetical

purposes. This dissertation examines possible motivations for biblical works' depictions of Solomon in an effort to understand those works' possible literary intent while also following how those same texts are used and often repurposed by subsequent interpreters.

With respect to those books of the Bible featuring Solomonic attribution, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Proverbs, the dissertation will attempt to demonstrate a connection with Solomon that extends beyond mere pseudepigraphy. The dissertation will seek to demonstrate that Solomonic attribution exists not just as an attempt to seek authority and popular acceptance for the work, but rather reflects larger themes. The attributions to Solomon in Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs serve as indicators that those books take Solomon as their subject, not their author. As such, the dissertation will seek to identify literary elements within these works beyond mere attribution that connect them to the Solomon narrative and reflect responses to that narrative. These allusions comprise deliberate mention of Solomon in the text, as in Song of Songs, literary allusions to material in the Book of Kings, such as Solomon's wealth and relationship with women, and broader discussion of themes directly relevant to problems posed by Solomon's behavior. As with Chronicles, we will need to establish that these works were composed subsequent to the Solomon narrative in Kings, so that we can establish that shared literary elements allude back to Kings and not the other way around. We will also examine the historical context in which these works were written in order to determine possible motivations for their respective portrayals of Solomon.

While the dissertation seeks to trace the reception of Solomon in Jewish sources over time, we will also examine treatments of Solomon in Second Temple literature and early Christian writings. This is not to say that Second Temple sources remained relevant to Jewish exegetes throughout the ages. The Jewish exegetes of the Middle Ages were completely

unaware of Hellenistic Jewish exegetical works like those of Philo or Josephus.⁴ However, these texts reflect the historic milieu within which rabbinic literature emerged. As such, we will examine the exegetical strategies of Josephus, apocryphal works such as *The Wisdom of Solomon*, and Christian texts including the New Testament and other early Christian responses to both the biblical Solomon as well as the Solomon of popular lore. These texts reveal a popular perception of Solomon that is highly esoteric. One can argue that there are two Solomons in late antiquity, the “historic” Solomon of Scripture and the magical Solomon of folklore. The boundary between the two Solomons is not impassible, as they often meet and meld in our sources. Thus, Solomon’s association with magic and exorcisms is one with which rabbinic literature is aware and which it treats. Thus, we will examine these esoteric depictions of Solomon with the purpose of comparing and contrasting them with rabbinic treatments of similar themes.

Analysis of rabbinic literature poses unique challenges. Rabbinic literature reflects multiple voices over an extended period of time. The responses to Solomon within the Talmuds and midrashic collections are varied and have developed over the centuries. Unlike solitary biblical works, rabbinic literature represents a massive corpus stretching over several collections and centuries. This corpus of literature contains material both critical of and sympathetic to Solomon. The dissertation will discuss major midrashic traditions treating Solomon. In preparation for this discussion I catalogued midrashim treating Solomon in tannaitic and amoraic works as well as in the midrashic collections stretching into the early Middle Ages. I

⁴ Meira Polliack, “Concepts of Scripture among the Jews of the Medieval Islamic World,” in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 84-85.

systematically examined all mentions of Solomon, noting their source, to whom they were attributed if at all, whether the tradition was Palestinian or Babylonian, and whether the source seemed to offer a positive, negative, neutral, or mixed depiction of Solomon.⁵ The dissertation will discuss discernible trends from this cataloguing effort, to the extent any exist, and will compare those results with those of scholarship on the same topic. The dissertation will address the pitfalls of trying to identify historical trends within rabbinic literature based on time period and geography. It will also discuss the methodological challenges that face this type of scholarship based on the difficulties of identifying motivations for positive and negative portrayals of Solomon as well as the imprecise nature of determining whether any particular midrashic tradition is in fact defending or criticizing Solomon. The dissertation will, in response, discuss the relationship between criticism and apologetics, since apologetics, by definition, must tacitly acknowledge and respond to potential criticism. In addition, it will also discuss the varying results of scholars' attempts to discern trends and political motivations within midrashic literature and what the resultant lack of continuity means for our understanding of these texts and why they were written.

With respect to popular notions of Solomon, the dissertation will discuss the rabbinic treatment of the esoteric or mystical Solomon. Many legends surround Solomon regarding his power to heal, his power over demons, his role as a magician, and his mastery of esoteric knowledge. While these associations with Solomon were highly popular in late antiquity, making their way into early Christian texts and persisting into the Middle Ages, rabbinic literature suppressed many of these folk traditions in an effort to distance Solomon from the type

⁵ The sheer size of this survey excludes its inclusion in the dissertation. However, the dissertation will discuss its findings and the limitations of such projects.

of magic of which the rabbis disapproved. As such, rabbinic literature reflects a much more limited portrait of Solomon's mastery over demons in the Ashmedai tradition, and even there it is used to denigrate demonology and Solomon's association with it. Because of this rabbinic effort to distance Solomon from these esoteric traditions, the tradition of Solomon as a magician is often absent or severely muted within Jewish sources during late antiquity with a few notable exceptions. As such, to the extent that these popular perceptions impact rabbinic evaluations of Solomon, they seem to inspire polemic and rejection rather than imitation. This rabbinic attitude toward the magical Solomon is reflected in his general absence from Jewish medieval and subsequent exegetical portrayals of Solomon.

The dissertation will also examine Solomon's treatment in targumic literature. As with the other texts examined, the dissertation will address composition dates of the targumim to Kings, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Esther in order to determine their comparative provenance with major midrashic collections. This is relevant due to scholarly debate over the nature of the relationship between the targumim and midrashic literature, as well as the relationship between targumic traditions and Islamic sources. While the dissertation will not establish the precise nature of that relationship, which remains beyond the power of current scholarship, it will seek to establish the literary originality of the targumim despite their use of many of the same midrashic traditions used in the midrashic collections. The dissertation will also examine the ways in which the targumim diverge from rabbinic literature, especially with regard to their portrayal of Solomon and how that portrayal influences subsequent understanding of the underlying biblical works and Solomon's role in them. The dissertation will focus on the pivotal role played by the Targum to the Song of Songs in its depiction of Solomon as a prophet. In addition, the dissertation will examine similarities between targumic literary treatments of

Solomon and the depiction of Solomon in the Qur'an and Islamic texts. Like many Second Temple and early Christian sources, Islamic texts tend to emphasize an esoteric image of Solomon, but with a uniquely Islamic emphasis. The dissertation will consider the Islamic understanding of Solomon through its texts and the extent to which that perception may have been shared by targumic literature of late antiquity and early Middle Ages.

In treating the Jewish medieval exegetes, the dissertation will examine hermeneutical trends in Jewish biblical interpretation during the Middle Ages. Each of these approaches is likely to produce a variant understanding of Solomon. We will also examine the limitations of some approaches, particularly the mystical, in responding to the biblical Solomon and the problems he poses. Mystical use of Solomon ceases to treat Solomon as a historic individual and view him in symbolic terms. As a result, the dissertation will give only brief treatment to kabbalistic responses to Solomon, providing the dissertation with a chronological point of termination for its reception history. In addition, special attention will be placed on the medieval exegetes' relationship to Targum Song of Songs and how it influenced popular perceptions of Solomon. As such, the dissertation will examine Rashi's use of the Targum in his own commentary to the Song and the extent to which Rashi diverges from it. The dissertation will also examine other exegetes' treatment of the Song in an attempt to determine the Targum's influence over Jewish medieval understanding of the Song and Solomon. The dissertation will also address to what degree the various commentators adhere to midrashic traditions, and to what extent they defer to a *peshat*, or plain meaning, reading of the Kings narrative. The issue of *peshat* versus *drash* adds a new element to the question of the Jewish reception of the Solomon story. The medieval movement to interpret Scripture by its more literal meaning would logically lead the exegetes to understand Solomon's crimes in Kings as direct participation in idolatry.

However, the theological challenges of Solomon's sinfulness seem to push many of those exegetes to embrace more apologetic midrashic approaches. Thus, the dissertation will reflect on the pressures on *peshat* exegetes to abandon *peshat* interpretation where midrashic and *peshat* meanings collide. In addition, the dissertation will consider the influence of non-Jewish exegetical treatments of Solomon in the Middle Ages. Therefore, the dissertation will examine Christian treatments of Solomon during this period to the extent that Jewish and Christian exegesis possibly drew upon each other.

In its conclusion, the dissertation will consider the fate of Solomon in the contemporary Jewish mindset. This portion of the dissertation will not seek to systematically examine treatments of Solomon since the Middle Ages. However, a few examples will be discussed to demonstrate how exegetical trends from the Middle Ages have influenced more contemporary Jewish understandings of Solomon. The conclusion will also examine the development of Jewish exegesis as it manifests itself in the evolution of attitudes about Solomon. As such, the reception history presented in this dissertation attempts to create a sense of continuity through the extant texts regarding Solomon. I do not claim to present an exhaustive study of every consideration of Solomon throughout Israelite and Jewish literature. Whether it is even possible to approach our subject that comprehensively is debatable. However, the dissertation does attempt to address all of the major treatments of Solomon within the various exegetical periods in an attempt to consistently follow this single exegetical subject and determine how it changes in the available texts. This approach stands in contrast to reception histories that offer selected portraits of their subjects from various historical periods. Such a snapshot approach is useful in establishing distinctions between receptions of a particular subject but less useful for following the development of those varying receptions. This dissertation seeks to more closely examine the

development of exegetical attitudes toward Solomon in an attempt to understand why those approaches change over time. In turn, this will hopefully offer greater insight into Jewish exegetical trends in general, contributing to our greater understanding of Jewish exegetical strategies over the ages.

1.3 Chapter Breakdown

Chapter Two begins with an examination of the Solomon narrative in the Book of Kings. The chapter will first introduce the basic narrative as it appears in Kings. The chapter will then examine the general context of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History, when it was composed, and its literary purposes. The chapter will then turn to allusions made in the Solomonic narrative of Kings to two texts that appear earlier in Tanakh that seem to invoke the Solomon narrative, Deuteronomy 17's discussion of kingly prohibitions, and 1 Samuel 8's warnings of the excesses of a future monarch. Turning to Solomon's treatment in the book of Kings, Chapter Two will first examine the role Solomon plays in his own succession to the throne and in the consolidation of his power. The chapter will then consider the two major views of the Solomon narrative of 1 Kings 3-11: the Golden Age marked by piety and prosperity, followed by a downfall in Solomon's older age, versus the view that Solomon is a flawed king from the very start. Our treatment of Solomon in the Book of Kings will conclude with a discussion of whether the picture of Solomon portrayed in Kings is positive or negative or whether any conclusive moral portrait emerges at all.

Chapter Two will then turn to the treatment of Solomon in the Book of Chronicles. The chapter will first seek to establish that Chronicles is a later work that draws upon the Book of Kings. The chapter will then investigate the primary ways in which the Chronicler alters the

Solomon narrative from that of Kings and the Chronicler's historic purpose in writing Chronicles and making those alterations. Finally, we will consider the consequences of Chronicles' treatment of Solomon and what precedents Chronicles sets for future exegetes of the Solomon narrative. Chapter Two will conclude with an examination of Solomon's appearance in other biblical works: Psalms 72 and 127, which are attributed to Solomon, and the Book of Nehemiah. We will examine the rhetorical use of Solomon in Nehemiah as well as how it reflects the reception of the competing Solomon narratives of Kings and Chronicles.

Chapter Three will examine Solomon's role on the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, as well as Solomon's role in the debates surrounding those books' canonicity. First, we will discuss the nature of these three works, their basic themes and structure, as well as their historic provenance. We will then examine the literary allusions to the Solomon narrative that appear in Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, evaluating the role Solomon plays in both. The chapter will then turn to the controversies surrounding the canonization of the Solomonic books. First, we will examine the problems posed by the Solomonic works that makes their canonicity debatable or at least controversial in the first place. We will also examine Solomon's role in these debates to determine whether Solomonic authorship plays any role in the status of the works attributed to him. We will examine the nature of the rabbinic debates surrounding the Solomonic works and the consequences of these rabbinic debates on rabbinic understanding of Solomon and the problems that he raises.

In Chapter Four, we will turn to the rabbinic treatment of Solomon in late antiquity. We will first examine the role of Solomon in Second Temple literature and early Christian writings to establish the milieu from which rabbinic writings emerged. The chapter will then discuss the rabbinic sources in which Solomon traditions appear and introduce very briefly the function of

midrashic literature. Turning to the midrashic sources, we will examine rabbinic understandings of Solomon's wisdom, the talmudic contention that anyone who says the Solomon sinned is wrong, midrashim that associate Solomon's wedding to the daughter of Pharaoh with the destruction of the Temple, and unsuccessful rabbinic efforts to exclude Solomon from the world to come. The chapter will examine legends of Solomon's loss of his throne with special focus on the Ashmedai legend and its potential relationship with Christian theology. The chapter will then turn to the ways in which the midrashim create opportunities for Solomon's repentance. The chapter will conclude with an evaluation of competing rabbinic traditions and efforts by rabbinic scholars to discern historical trends within the rabbinic literature.

Chapter Five will trace assessments of Solomon expressed in the targumim, Aramaic translations of biblical books. We will begin the chapter with an overview of targumim as a literary genre. Turning to the specific targumim that deal with Solomon, we will first look at the Targum to the Book of Kings and its treatment of Solomon's sins. The chapter will then examine the Targum to Ecclesiastes, known as Targum Qohelet and the role Solomon plays in it as both narrator and prophet. The chapter will then consider the Targum to the Song of Songs and the unique prophetic approach the Targum takes toward Solomon. We will also consider the effects of the Targum's popularity and wide distribution on popular perceptions of Solomon. Chapter Five will conclude with a discussion of Solomon's depiction in the Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther and parallel traditions of Solomon that appear in the Qur'an and Islamic thought.

Chapter Six will address the fate of Solomon in medieval Jewish exegesis. The chapter will open with an introduction to medieval Jewish commentary to Tanakh. The chapter will then turn to the medieval treatment of the Song of Songs, Rashi's use of the Targum Song of Songs as a framework for his own commentary on the Song, and the influence of Rashi's commentary and

the Targum on other exegetical responses to the Song, including Christian interpretations. We will contrast the image of Solomon that emerges from medieval interpretation of the Song of Songs with the portrayal of Solomon in medieval commentary to the Book of Kings. We will examine how these exegetes deal with this negative material in light of their general impulse to defend Solomon. The chapter will conclude with a broader discussion of Solomonic apologetics in the Middle Ages. This section will examine attitudes toward Solomon as a model ruler in both Jewish and Christian exegesis.

Chapter Seven will seek to conclude the dissertation with a synthesis of all the exegetical responses discussed. It will seek to summarize the progression of Solomon's character from its introduction in Kings through subsequent literary treatments demonstrating how interpretive evaluations of Solomon have evolved over the ages. Finally, it will consider the dissertation's findings regarding the development of Jewish exegesis from biblical to medieval times.

CHAPTER TWO: SOLOMON IN THE BIBLE

2.1 Solomon in the Book of Kings

Basic Narrative

The Solomon narrative in the Book of Kings is our starting point. It is the text that establishes the Solomon story and the text to which we will be comparing all subsequent works. As such, we need to establish a solid understanding of Solomon's portrayal in Kings. The Solomon narrative extends from the beginning of 1 Kings through chapter 11, which ends with Solomon's death. The first two chapters of 1 Kings deal with Solomon's succession to the throne. Chapter 1 of Kings depicts an aging and ineffectual David. His eldest surviving son, Adonijah, anticipating his own succession to the throne, begins to consolidate his supporters. Seeing this, the prophet Nathan recruits Bathsheba to implore David to make Solomon king. Bathsheba and Nathan confront David with his previous promise to make Solomon king. David acquiesces, arranging to have Solomon anointed. When Adonijah learns of Solomon's anointment, he fears for his life and seeks sanctuary upon the altar, and Solomon graciously spares his life.

In Chapter 2, David delivers his final instructions to Solomon before his death. He advises Solomon to uphold God's commandments. He also advises Solomon to do away with Joab in order to avenge the baseless murders of Abner and Amasa, and to similarly kill Shimei ben Gera for humiliating David years earlier. He further asks Solomon to support the sons of Barzillai, an old ally. After David's death, Adonijah asks Bathsheba permission to marry Abishag, David's former concubine. The request is viewed as a ploy to claim the throne, and Solomon has Adonijah killed. Solomon exiles the priest Abiathar, who had aligned himself with

Adonijah. Like Adonijah, Joab runs to the altar to seek sanctuary, but Solomon has him killed there regardless. Solomon spares Shimei, but only on condition he never leave Jerusalem. When Shimei travels outside the city to locate some runaway servants, Solomon has him killed.

Succession and old scores settled, chapter 3 begins with Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, a statement about Solomon's love for God, and an acknowledgement that Israel continued to worship at high places. The chapter then proceeds to Solomon's dream at Gibeon. In this revelatory dream, God offers to grant Solomon's any request. Solomon chooses wisdom to judge his people. Pleased with the request, God grants Solomon not only wisdom, but wealth and honor as well. God also promises Solomon a long life if he will adhere to God's commandments. The text then turns to the case of two prostitutes, each claiming to be the mother of the same baby boy. Solomon offers to divide the child by sword, giving a half to each mother. When one mother offers to waive her claim rather than see the child killed, Solomon determines her to be the true mother and awards her custody. Word of his decision awes Solomon's subjects who marvel at his divinely gifted wisdom.

Chapter 4 lists Solomon's officers at court. It also describes how Solomon appointed twelve officers over Israel to oversee the supply of the royal court's needs, each portion of Israel providing one month's worth of sustenance. Chapter 5 describes the vast quantities of food consumed by the court each day amidst a description of idyllic peace and expanded borders. Solomon acquires large numbers of horses and provides for their needs. The text describes Solomon's wisdom as exceeding that of other nations, attributing to him many proverbs and songs as well as special knowledge of nature. This wisdom attracts the attention of surrounding rulers. Solomon establishes a relationship with Hiram, king of Tyre, and contracts to purchase

raw supplies for the building of the Temple. Solomon establishes a system of enforced labor to build the Temple.

Chapter 6 describes the dimensions and features of Solomon's Temple. During construction, God reminds Solomon to abide by His commandments. Solomon completes construction in seven years. Chapter 7 interrupts the construction of the Temple to inform us that Solomon built his own palace in thirteen years in addition to another palace for the daughter of Pharaoh. The text continues with its description of the Temple and its vessels. In chapter 8, Solomon installs the Ark of the Covenant inside the new Temple, inaugurating the Temple for sacrificial worship. Once the Ark is placed in the Holy of Holies, God's cloud fills the Temple indicating God's habitation in this new abode. Solomon launches into a dedicatory speech in which he describes the dedication as the culmination of his father's dreams. Solomon prays that God will take habitation in the Temple and will accept Israel's offerings there as atonement for their sins. He also prays that the Temple will serve as a focus of prayer and that God will listen to the prayers offered there. Solomon adds a prayer that the people will remain faithful to God and fulfill His commandments. At the conclusion of his prayer, Solomon offers a great number of sacrifices and commences a celebratory feast that lasts two weeks.

In chapter 9, God appears to Solomon again, in response to his prayer, and reminds him to follow God's ways. God warns Solomon that if he abandons Him, God will take the land of Israel away from him and the people and will destroy the Temple. The chapter continues to discuss Solomon's ongoing building projects and his sale of cities to Hiram. The chapter provides another description of the regimen of enforced labor. Solomon offers sacrifices in the Temple three times a year. With Hiram's help, Solomon establishes a navy, which travels the world to bring him gold.

Chapter 10 begins with the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon. Having heard of his wisdom, she comes to see for herself, bearing gifts. Answering all of her questions, Solomon impresses the queen, and she professes her admiration. She returns to her home with generous gifts from Solomon. The chapter next describes Solomon's tremendous wealth, his stores of gold, and his extravagant carved golden throne. Solomon's wisdom not only attracts the attention of surrounding rulers but also their wealth, as they willingly pay tribute to him. The chapter ends with another description of Solomon's vast holdings in horses and chariots.

Chapter 11 informs us that Solomon loved foreign women, including those from nations God had forbidden to enter into Israel. Solomon accumulates seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. These wives turn his heart from God toward their gods. Solomon builds shrines to these gods. God responds angrily, informing Solomon that He will tear the kingdom from him after his death. God raises a number of adversaries against Solomon that wage war against Israel. Most notably, God raises Jeroboam, Solomon's former servant. Ahijah, the prophet, informs Jeroboam that God is giving him reign over ten of the tribes of Israel and allowing Solomon's son to keep just two. Solomon dies at the end of chapter 11.

Although the Solomon narrative ends with Solomon's death, the fallout of his reign continues into the reign of his son, Rehoboam. Amos Frisch argues that the Solomon narrative continues into chapter 12 until the schism of the kingdom, since Solomon is frequently mentioned, and since the text sees Solomon as playing a large role in the split of the two kingdoms.⁶ This conclusion is borne out by God's message to Solomon in chapter 11 that it is his sin that causes the schism. As it happens, in chapter 12, the people appeal to Rehoboam to

⁶ Amos Frisch, "Structure and Its Significance: The Narrative of Solomon's Reign (1 Kings 1 – 12.24)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 51 (1991): 6, 8.

lighten the burden of enforced labor implemented by Solomon. Rehoboam responds harshly, indicating his intent to make the burden far greater than his father did. Under Jeroboam's leadership, the ten tribes of the north secede from the kingdom, establishing the northern kingdom of Israel. Rehoboam retains only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the southern kingdom of Judah. Jeroboam, fearing his people's religious fidelity to Jerusalem, builds competing temples in Beth-el and Dan, violating the tenet of centralized worship in Jerusalem.

Background to Kings

The Book of Kings is the logical starting point for our investigation of Solomon's legacy. It is the source text, the oldest rendition of the Solomon narrative, and the text to which all subsequent texts must respond or, failing that, willfully ignore. However, the Book of Kings is not a history text, nor does it purport to be one. Repeatedly, it refers its readers to the Annals of the Kings of Judah or the Annals of the Kings of Israel if they want to consult the raw historic record. Rather, the Book of Kings is narrative literature with historiographical intent. It is also didactic literature with theological intent.⁷ In other words, Kings is a literary work based on historic events and personalities that was written to serve a particular religious point of view and to educate its readers accordingly.

The Book of Kings is part of the Deuteronomist History, which comprises Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books record the events that take place after the death of Moses until the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile. All of these books have the same literary quality as Kings in that they are not purely historic, and all serve to further a particularly Deuteronomist theological reading of the events they cover. There is much

⁷ Iain W. Provan, *1 & 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2012), 1. Again, I am not concerned with the historical truth of Solomon. Kings is written with the presumption that Solomon is an actual historical figure. Therefore, we will read it accordingly on its own terms.

scholarly debate regarding the composition of the Deuteronomist History as well as regarding its redaction levels.⁸ The material in the Deuteronomist History reveals multiple styles, genres, and attitudes. Thus, it is difficult to speak of a single Deuteronomist author or even a single Deuteronomist theology. For instance, both Samuel and Kings offer varying attitudes toward the idea of an Israelite monarchy, with some material outspokenly anti-monarchal and with other material brazenly apologetic toward the Davidic dynasty and sympathetic to kingship in general.⁹ For the most part, Kings offers an explanation as to why the united monarchy split and ultimately fell. Broadly speaking, the Book of Kings blames the exile on Israel's sins, most prominently the worship of foreign gods. Israelite kings are also assessed by their faithfulness or betrayal of God while being held accountable for the theological piety of the people.

There are multiple theories to account for the varying voices and attitudes found within the Deuteronomist History. Many see the origins of the Deuteronomists during the reign of Josiah (seventh century BCE) or even as early as Hezekiah (eighth century BCE), while still finding evidence of later redactions into the exilic period. Others see evidence of a pre-Deuteronomist record, perhaps of northern provenance, upon which the Deuteronomists built their history.¹⁰ In either case, the Deuteronomist History would have been commissioned by Josiah or perhaps Hezekiah in order to impose upon Israelite history a narrative consonant with the religious reforms these kings enacted, with an emphasis on centralized worship of the

⁸ We will see an example of these debates in our discussion of the relationship between the descriptions of Solomon's amassing of horses, wealth, and women in 1 Kings 10-11 and the Deuteronomic prohibitions against an Israelite king's amassing those very three items in Deuteronomy 17. We will see that there is debate as to the provenance of these two texts relative to each other and whether either was composed in light of the other.

⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 293.

¹⁰ Steven L. McKenzie, "Deuteronomist History," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, eds. Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, and John David Pleins (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 160-166.

Israelite God exclusively in Jerusalem. Andrew Knapp and Eric Seibert surmise that given much of the apologetic material in Solomon's succession narrative, that particular material may very well have been commissioned during his reign.¹¹ The events in Kings end with the release of Jehoiachin from captivity in Babylon in roughly 562-560 BCE. Even if the Deuteronomistic History underwent a process of revisions and redactions, it is thought to have taken its final form within the exilic period, placing its completion somewhere in the sixth to fifth centuries BCE.¹² This later material, including that describing post-exilic history, would have reflected the Deuteronomists' theological reactions to the exile and their attempts to explain it.¹³ As we have noted, the Deuteronomists tended to understand the exile and the destruction of the Temple as God's retributive response to Israel's sins, especially the sin of worshipping other gods.

This dissertation is less concerned with the precise dating of Kings' composition except to the extent that it can be shown that Kings predates other biblical treatments of Solomon. Even if Kings does not take its final form until after the Babylonian exile, this still provides a composition date generally accepted to precede that of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, as we shall see. Furthermore, we can safely presume that much of the Solomon legend predates the Babylonian exile either stemming from Josiah's period or even earlier. This is important to establish that other biblical works are responding to or are at least aware of the material in Kings regarding Solomon. If a text deliberately references material in Kings, it is important to understand that it is responding to Kings and not the other way around.

¹¹ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 275-276; Eric A. Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative: A Rereading of 1 Kings 1-11* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 107.

¹² Tremper Longman III, "Qoheleth as Solomon: 'For What Can Anyone Who Comes After the King Do?' (Ecclesiastes 2:12)," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, eds. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 45-46.

¹³ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 289.

Michael Fishbane explains that inner-biblical exegesis must begin with a fixed tradition, or *traditum*, which it interprets or from which it departs. Since biblical works are seldom singular works but rather compendia consisting of multiple strata, it can often be difficult to determine which texts are responding to which. However, once inner-biblical exegesis can be discerned, it offers a view into the early hermeneutical and exegetical strategies of ancient Israel¹⁴

Furthermore, if a text that discusses Solomon post-dates Kings but does not reference the Solomon narrative therein, we can more safely presume that the omission was deliberate. In addition, the dissertation is less concerned about redaction levels of Kings or identifying when any particular layer was added. This dissertation will address some of the scholarship discussing the motivations of the Deuteronomist historians and the eventual evolution of Kings into its present form. However, this dissertation will also consider the reception of Kings as a whole in its final form, especially in our consideration of later sources. Later texts, especially those emerging after the close of the biblical canon, did not respond to individual layers of Kings, but rather to the final product. Therefore, our focus, too, will be primarily on the Solomon narrative as a literary whole.

Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8

While the dissertation will eventually turn to later books' literary allusion to the Solomon narrative in Kings, there are two "earlier"¹⁵ biblical texts to which the Solomon story of Kings itself directly alludes: Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8. The first of these texts, Deuteronomy

¹⁴ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 7-8, 10, 19.

¹⁵ By "earlier," I do not mean to imply that the composition of these texts necessarily predates the composition of the Solomon narrative. As we shall see, there is debate whether Deuteronomy 17 predates the Deuteronomist History or whether it is a later addition to Deuteronomy written with Solomon in mind. 1 Samuel 8, like Kings, is part of the Deuteronomist History, making its earlier composition impossible to establish. Rather, I use "earlier" merely to acknowledge that these texts appear before Kings in Tanakh as it has been historically configured.

17:14-20, sets out the laws that will govern an Israelite king once the people of Israel have established their sovereignty in the land. It is not clear from the text whether a king is mandatory or merely optional (Deut. 17:14). To the extent that Israel is to have a king, that king must be chosen by God and cannot be a foreigner, but must come from Israel (17:15). Deuteronomy then continues to specify three prohibitions that bind the king. For our purposes, the next two verses are the most important: “16. Only, he shall not amass horses for himself, and he will not return the people to Egypt in order to amass horses, as the Lord said to you: You will never return this way ever again. 17. He shall not amass wives for himself, and he will not cause his heart to stray, and much silver and gold he shall not amass for himself” (17:16-17).¹⁶ Notably, the prohibitions against accumulating horses and wives explain that they function to prevent other outcomes, the return of the people to Egypt and the straying of the king’s heart (17:17). This last concern is especially significant in the context of the Solomon narrative in Kings. Finally, Deuteronomy requires the king to write down the law in a book and to read it throughout his life to remind him to fear God and abide by His commandments and to ensure the longevity of his reign and dynasty (17:18-20).

The Torah’s concept of an Israelite King as articulated in Deuteronomy is not identical to that of the Deuteronomist History. The Torah is more suspicious of kings than are the Deuteronomists. Many understand Deuteronomy as allowing Israel a king but not requiring one. Should Israel adopt a king, that king is subject to limitations on his power.¹⁷ The limits on

¹⁶ All translations of primary texts throughout this dissertation are my own unless noted otherwise.

¹⁷ Gary N. Knoppers, “Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist History: The Case of Kings,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 63, no. 3 (July 2001): 394, 397-398; Abraham Melamed, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 7.

kingly power described in Deuteronomy 17 represent a radical innovation.¹⁸ These limitations do not serve merely to minimize the king's ability to exploit his subjects. They represent real limitations on his executive powers. Obviously, the limitation on wealth accumulation hampers the king's ability to engage in national spending. Gary Knoppers adds that the prohibition against accumulating horses restricts the king's ability to wage war and engage in foreign trade. The limit on his number of wives constrains the potential for political marriages. The mandate that the king write a Torah or law¹⁹ and read it subordinates the king's power to that of God's law. Deuteronomy anticipates no role for the king in waging war, making laws, judging the people, leading national worship, eradicating idolatry, or even teaching Torah. The limitations of Deuteronomy 17 effectively relegate the king to the role of a symbolic head of state.²⁰ This Deuteronomic image of an impotent figurehead hardly squares with the role of the king in the Deuteronomist History. The good kings of the Deuteronomist History are uncritically depicted waging wars, enacting religious edicts, judging the people, acting as symbols of Israelite religious piety, eradicating idolatry, and teaching Torah. Thus, the Deuteronomist History lauds a powerful central authority as long as he maintains subservience to God and adherence to God's law.

¹⁸ William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 110. Schniedewind views this innovation as the product of the Deuteronomic "levitical priests" whose authority benefitted from a more limited monarchy (110-111).

¹⁹ What exactly the king is supposed to transcribe is not made clear in Deuteronomy 17:18. As it states that the king is to write "a copy of this teaching in a scroll," this could refer to anything from the entire Torah, to the book of Deuteronomy, to just the section on the laws that bind the king.

²⁰ Knoppers, "Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist History," 401-405.

Deuteronomy 17 is significant to the Solomon narrative in Kings, because Solomon manages to violate all of the kingly prohibitions listed therein.²¹ Solomon's hyperbolic accumulation of horses, wealth, and women demands the reader view his actions in light of Deuteronomy 17. Material in 1 Kings 10-11 offers additional details emphasizing Solomon's violations of these prohibitions. The text informs us that Solomon procured his horses from Egypt (1 Kg. 10:28-29), thus creating a textual reference to Deuteronomy's warning that the king not accumulate too many horses lest he return the nation to Egypt (Deut. 17:16). Similarly, the Solomon narrative expressly informs us twice in successive verses that Solomon's foreign wives "turned his heart" (1 Kg. 11:3-4), which is precisely what Deuteronomy had warned would happen if the king took too many wives (Deut 17:17).²² In addition to the reiteration of turning the heart, the text of 1 Kings 11:1 emphasizes that Solomon loved "many," רבות, women, invoking the prohibition in Deuteronomy 17:17 that the king not "multiply," ירבה, wives.²³ Furthermore, the text in Kings is careful to quantify the degree to which Solomon violated these prohibitions. Solomon has forty thousand stalls for horses and twelve thousand horsemen, building entire cities around his horse holdings (1 Kg. 5:6, 10:26). Solomon's wealth becomes so vast that the value of silver is devalued to that of mere stones (1 Kg. 10:27). Solomon has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kg. 11:3). While it is true that hyperbolic numbers are employed elsewhere in the Solomon narrative – he composes three thousand

²¹ Christine Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 223; Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 59-60.

²² Marc Brettler, "The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 16, no. 49 (1991): 91-92.

²³ Amos Frisch, "תיאור חטאי שלמה (מל"א י"א א-ה): ניתוח ספרותי-תיאולוגי" ["A Literary and Theological Analysis of Solomon's Sins (1 Kings 11:1-8)"], *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, 11 (1997): 173. Of course, the verb ירבה, "multiply," is also used in reference to horses and wealth (Deut. 17:16-17), but this does not necessarily undermine the literary illusion.

proverbs and one thousand and five songs (1 Kg. 5:12) – the purpose of these particular figures is to ensure that the reader does not miss the fact that Solomon has violated all three kingly prohibitions in spectacular fashion.

Some scholars posit that the kingly prohibitions of Deuteronomy 17 constitute later additions to Deuteronomy, dating from the exilic period when the monarchy had definitively failed.²⁴ From this perspective, Deuteronomy 17 is used to criticize Solomon.²⁵ However, others view the kingly laws of Deuteronomy 17 as pre-Deuteronomistic, perhaps reflecting the values of the Judean prophets who sought to limit the power and abuses of the monarchy, or functioning as a polemical text from the northern kingdom. In either case, Deuteronomy 17 would predate the material in Kings, and, thus, the parallels between the two texts would reflect allusions in Kings to Deuteronomy, and not the other way around.²⁶ A third alternative exists in which the allusions to Deuteronomy 17 may represent an additional redaction level of Kings that is less in concert with the interests of the Deuteronomists.²⁷ Marc Brettler surmises that the material in the earlier chapters of the Solomon narrative describing Solomon's wealth and horses probably were initially written uncritically. However, since they fit nicely with the prohibitions in Deuteronomy 17, the redactor seized the opportunity to use them as material critical of Solomon and then added the material about Solomon's wives to complete the transgressive triumvirate.²⁸

The relative provenances of Deuteronomy 17 and the material in Kings describing Solomon's

²⁴ John J Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 89; Knoppers, "Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist History," 413-414.

²⁵ Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 113.

²⁶ Brettler, "The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11," 92-93; Gary N. Knoppers, "Solomon's Fall and Deuteronomy," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 392-394.

²⁷ Knoppers, "Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist History," 414.

²⁸ Brettler, "The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11," 95.

violations of those prohibitions makes little difference to our interest in the connection between the two texts. Whether Deuteronomy 17 was a late addition to Deuteronomy, whether it is among some of the oldest proto-Deuteronomistic material, or whether Solomon's violation of the prohibitions was a late addition to Kings, in any of these three compositional scenarios, the literary intent is to criticize Solomon, and the damning material was ultimately preserved in Tanakh in that manner.

Not everyone, however, reads the literary connections between Deuteronomy 17 and the Solomon narrative as critical of Solomon. For example, Knoppers sees the two texts as embracing different views of the Israelite king. Deuteronomy 17 reflects Temple concerns, while the Deuteronomist History envisions a far more powerful king who wages wars, actively participates in sacral worship, is responsible for eradicating idolatry, and represents Israel before God. Knoppers does not read the Solomon narrative as using Deuteronomy 17 to criticize Solomon. Rather, the Solomon narrative does not seem to care about his accumulation of horses, wealth, and women. In the end, it is Solomon's idolatry that brings down the kingdom, not his violations of the three kingly prohibitions. To the extent that Solomon's wives play a role in that sin, the problem stems from his marriage to foreign women, not to too many women. Furthermore, Solomon's wealth is divinely ordained during the revelation at Gibeon, and both his wealth and horses are mentioned in the Solomon narrative without criticism. Thus, Knoppers reads the literary allusions to Deuteronomy 17 as a subversion of the Deuteronomistic text used to celebrate Solomon's royal accomplishments.²⁹

While Knoppers may be correct in his analysis, the final form of Kings still preserves the allusion to Deuteronomy 17. Even if it were added to subvert the critical intent of Deuteronomy

²⁹ Knoppers, "Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist History," 405-413.

17, most still read its survival in Scripture as critical of Solomon. Furthermore, it is very difficult to conclude exactly what caused the dissolution of the united Davidic kingdom. Solomon's failings are multiple. Certainly, the text explicitly blames the breakup of the kingdom on Solomon's idolatry (1 Kg. 11:9-11). However, when the north actually secedes from Rehoboam's rule, the purported cause is Solomon's oppressive taxation and forced labor policies (1 Kg. 12:3-19). No mention is made of idolatry. Thus, the narrative in Kings is able to support numerous explanations for the split of the Israelite kingdom. The Solomonic violations of Deuteronomy 17's kingly prohibitions, too, provide the editor of Kings with an explanation for the dissolution of the united Davidic kingdom. At the very least, they paint a picture of a failed king who falls well below the standards laid out for the Israelite king in the Torah.

In addition to the allusion to Deuteronomy 17, the Solomon narrative in Kings seems to allude to the speech of the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:11-18. Solomon manages to fulfill all of the dire warnings enunciated by Samuel in his diatribe.³⁰ At the end of the period of the judges, a period marked by fractured leadership, inter-tribal strife, and internecine warfare with neighboring powers, the people of Israel approach Samuel with a request for a king (1 Sam. 8:5). Samuel reacts angrily to the request (8:6), either because he views the request as a rejection of God's direct sovereignty or because he sees it as a rejection of his own leadership as judge over Israel. God, however, instructs Samuel to accede to the people's request (8:7-9). Samuel concedes, but before embarking on a search for a king, he delivers a speech to the people

³⁰ Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible*, 223; Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 87. There seems to be far less scholarly attention given to the connections between Solomon's reign and Samuel's rebuke in 1 Samuel 8:11-18 than is devoted to the connection between Solomon's reign and the kingly prohibitions of Deuteronomy 17. I have no explanation for this disparity, especially when the material in Samuel seems so specifically aimed at the Solomon narrative. Perhaps the connection is lost because the text comes in the context of the search for Israel's first king, who will emerge as Saul. Perhaps the presumption is that Samuel is describing Saul's future depredations. However, Saul's faults do not particularly resemble Samuel's particular description in 1 Samuel 8.

warning them about the excesses and abuses that their future king is certain to impose upon them. Samuel warns them:

11. ...he will take your sons and place them for his chariots and as his horsemen, and they will run before his chariots. 12. And he will place them for him as officers over thousands and officers over fifties, and to plow his plowings and harvest his harvests, and to make his weapons of war and his chariots. 13. And he will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. 14. And he will take the best of your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive trees, and he will give them to his servants. 15. And he will claim a tenth of your seed and your vineyards, and he will give them to his chamberlains and his servants. 16. And he will take your best servants and maidservants and young men, as well as your donkeys, and he will put them to his labor. 17. He will claim a tenth of your flocks, and you will be servants to him. 18. And you will cry on that day from before your king that you chose for yourselves, and the Lord will not answer you on that day (1 Sam. 8:11-18).

This speech constitutes the single most anti-monarchical expression in all of Tanakh. However, it does not express what we might expect Samuel to express when warning the people of the future excesses of a king. When the Book of Kings describes its worst kings, they are castigated for failing to uproot idolatry from the land or, even worse, for promoting the worship of foreign gods. Jeroboam, who becomes a model of the sinful king for the north, is castigated for establishing his own temples, instructing his people to worship golden calves, and preventing his people from worshipping in Jerusalem. Ahab, along with his wife Jezebel, promotes worship of Baal and oversees the murder of hundreds of God's prophets. Manasseh devotes himself to idol worship, defiling the Temple for that cause. Yet, Samuel's speech fails to touch upon any of these depredations.

Rather, Samuel's speech eerily describes the reign of Solomon to the exclusion of any other king described in Samuel or Kings. The speech starts with a description of forced

conscription specifically for needs created by horses. No other king is described as having horse holdings on the scale of Solomon's. Both verses 8:11 and 8:12 of Samuel's rebuke make reference to chariots. Furthermore, the description of conscription throughout the rebuke characterizes very well Solomon's use of forced labor for his public projects. Oddly, Samuel warns that the people's daughters will be conscripted as perfumers, cooks, and bakers (8:13). We might anticipate that the king would seize their daughters to be in his harem. Of course, Solomon preferred foreign women. Israelite girls are impressed to provide for the extravagant culinary needs of the royal household, also emphasized in Kings. Those needs require not only the labor of the youth of Israel, but also its produce, hence the description of tithing to maintain the king's appetite.

Samuel's diatribe does not reflect on the reigns of either Saul or David, as neither is depicted in the Book of Samuel as following these policies. Saul's kingdom is highly decentralized with no discernible infrastructure beyond his ability to muster an army. David's reign is more centralized, and he establishes a capital in Jerusalem that involves building projects (2 Sam. 5). However, these projects appear modest in comparison to Solomon's ambitious development of the capital. For example, whatever palace David built for himself must have been far too modest for Solomon's tastes, because he builds his own palace just a generation later. The text of Samuel devotes minimal space to David's building projects or royal expenses. Furthermore, there is never a single mention of horses with regard to David and his reign. The fact that Solomon must ride on a mule to his own anointing (1 Kg. 1:38) suggests that David may

not have owned any horses at all.³¹ Thus, Samuel's speech in 1 Samuel 8 seems composed solely with Solomon in mind.

The final two verses of Samuel's impassioned speech deliberately allude to Egyptian servitude. In verse 8:17, Samuel assures the people, ואתם תהיו-לו לעבדים, "you will surely be servants to him." However, the word עבדים can mean either servants or slaves. When read with the following verse, 8:18, the implication is one of slavery, not compensated servitude. Verse 18 assures the people that they will cry out to God, but He will not listen to them. This verse alludes to depiction of Egyptian servitude in Exodus: "23. ...and the children of Israel groaned because of the labor, and they cried, and their imploring from their labor rose up to God. 24. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex. 2:23-24). However, Samuel inverts the message: God heard your screams when you were enslaved in Egypt, but He will not hear your screams when you are enslaved to the king whom you requested. As we shall see in our further discussion of Solomon in Kings, references to Egyptian servitude constitute a recurring theme that the Solomon narrative utilizes to critique Solomon, especially in reference to Solomon's imposing forced labor on the people. Here, too, the themes of imposed labor and Egyptian servitude are invoked with Solomon in mind.

³¹ The mule is an odd detail in the text. There is little talk of mules in Tanakh, although they do make rare appearances. The curious part about this mule is that the Torah expressly prohibits interbreeding different animal species (Lev. 19:19). A mule is the byproduct of breeding a jack, a male donkey, with a mare, a female horse. Why David should have such an animal is never explained. The Palestinian Talmud rules that it is prohibited to ride a mule, but excuses Solomon's conduct by determining that this particular mule was created by God during the six days of creation rather than through interbreeding (y. *Kilayim* 8:2). Notwithstanding, the mule, given its forbidden nature, could be construed negatively with regard to Solomon. At the very least, a mule is less dignified than a horse. However, the text may be seeking to distinguish David's humble mount from the massive collection of horses Solomon will later boast. See *Tanhuma Hayei Sarah* 7 contrasting the absence of any horses in the court before Solomon becomes king with his massive accumulation thereafter.

In truth, biblical material expresses a preference for God's direct sovereignty, but it also acknowledges the utility of a centralized governmental authority.³² Samuel's anti-monarchical screed is not the final word on the Bible's view of monarchy. Its celebration of David, Hezekiah, and Josiah imply support for the monarchy. Furthermore, the depiction of the horrors of near-anarchy in the Book of Judges offers a strong argument for a centralized form of government that can unite the tribes and muster a national defense. Since Samuel's speech describes the excesses of only one particular king, Solomon, one can construe his impassioned argument not as a criticism of monarchy as an institution, but as criticism specifically of Solomon's monarchy.³³ At the same time, one can also read Samuel's diatribe as the anti-monarchical screed it purports to be. The fact that Samuel's descriptions of kingly excess so deliberately depict Solomon's abuses may reflect the Deuteronomistic view that Solomon initiates the decline of the Davidic monarchy, serving as an archetype for all of the failed kings who would follow him.

The Succession Narrative

Solomon is born half way through 2 Samuel (12:24-25), although we hear nothing more about him for the rest of that book. However, what we do hear offers a mixed image of the future king. Solomon is the son of David and Bathsheba. His birth arguably marks the conclusion of the David/Bathsheba/Uriah narrative. The child born of David and Bathsheba's adulterous liaison dies soon after his birth. Solomon is their second child, conceived soon after the death of the first (2 Sam. 12:15-25). In this sense, Solomon bears the taint of David and

³² Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 7.

³³ This requires a reading of Samuel's speech as foreshadowing Solomon's reign. Since Samuel and Kings are both part of the Deuteronomistic History, I see little problem with treating the two books as parts of a unified literary work, with one part foreshadowing events that will occur in a later part of that work. Furthermore, by placing this criticism in the mouth of a prophet, the text allows Samuel to anticipate and criticize Solomon from the past through prophetic foresight.

Bathsheba's illicit relationship, which is further darkened by the murder of Uriah. However, the text informs us in the self-same verse in which Solomon is born, "and the Lord loved him" (12:24). In addition, God Himself through the prophet Nathan bestows on Solomon a special name, Jedidiah, meaning "the beloved of the Lord" (12:25). The text offers no explanation as to why Solomon is so beloved as to merit this special affection and a divinely granted name. After all, he is a newborn infant. Thus, this unusual attention seems rather to allude to his potential or his future destiny. As a result, the circumstances of Solomon's birth present hints of Solomon's tremendous potential as well as his impending downfall.

Solomon's real narrative does not begin until the beginning of the Book of Kings. The first two chapters of Kings, what we will refer to as the succession narrative, describe David's decline and death, Solomon's ascent to the throne, and his consolidation of power. Scholars have noted that the succession narrative acts as Solomonic apologetics, justifying Solomon's succession and establishing his legitimacy as king, while simultaneously subtly criticizing Solomon and leaving doubts to the legitimacy of his succession. Knapp notes that the succession narrative legitimizes Solomon's claim to the throne through a number of historically standard methods. David's designation of Solomon as his successor justifies his rule through the reigning king's royal prerogative. The fact that the people champion Solomon's ascendance (1 Kg. 39-40) marks legitimacy through popular acclamation. The Book of Kings ultimately legitimizes Solomon's rival claim over Adonijah's because it judges Adonijah as an unworthy successor. Adonijah reveals his unfitness when he tries to seize the throne while David is still living and when he requests David's concubine, a symbolic gesture of claiming the throne. Finally,

Solomon's merciful treatment of Adonijah, at least initially, grants his succession greater legitimacy as well by demonstrating his mercy and wisdom.³⁴

In chapter 1, Solomon plays no active role in his succession to the throne.³⁵ Thus, Solomon is not viewed as a usurper. Rather, Adonijah, even though he is the natural successor to the throne, is made to look like the usurper. David is still alive when Adonijah declares himself king without consulting his father. David's old age and frailty add justification to Nathan and Bathsheba's actions. Their conduct is justified by the fear that the king is no longer aware of what is transpiring around him and no longer has the strength to assure the state is properly conducted. Meanwhile, Solomon is completely passive. He plays no role in the court machinations that assure his succession. He is even *made* to ride on David's mule to his own anointment (1 Kg. 1:38). All of these details exonerate Solomon from suspicion in his eventual ascent to the throne.³⁶ In addition, Solomon's succession fits neatly within the biblical precedent that prefers younger children over the first born. David himself was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons (1 Sam. 16:10-11). Thus, Solomon's succession in defiance of primogeniture should not shock a seasoned reader of Tanakh.

Yet there are strong reservations about the legitimacy of Solomon's succession. Solomon's ascension to the throne is arranged behind closed doors. One would expect Adonijah to become king, since he is David's oldest surviving son. While younger siblings in Tanakh seem to defy this natural order of succession, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to Israelite kings. David was the youngest of his brothers, but his father was not king. In fact,

³⁴ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 28-29, 49-50, 53, 55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 250; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 115; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 9; Steven Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 41.

³⁶ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 115-117, 119, 121, 123-124.

following Solomon's ascension to the throne, the rule of primogeniture becomes the historical default mode of succession for Israelite kings. This was clearly Adonijah's expectation, as he voices this belief, at least to himself (1 Kg. 1:5), and no one around him suggests otherwise. Unlike Saul and David's ascensions to the throne, there is no statement of divine election to support Solomon's claim. Furthermore, there is no discussion in the Book of Samuel of Solomon's becoming king after David. Thus, the text allows for the suspicion that David's purported promise to Bathsheba to make Solomon king is manufactured by Nathan and Bathsheba or by the narrator in order to legitimize Solomon's claim to the throne. Even if David does accede to Solomon's succession, it is not clear that he is of sound mind when he makes this decision. The best the text can do is to limit Solomon's role in his own succession, distancing him from the questionable machinations.³⁷ The succession narrative is unique among this sort of literature in the Ancient Near East in that it subtly raises questions about the legitimacy of Solomon's rule.³⁸

Solomon's passive role in his ascension to the throne stands in sharp contrast with his active role in consolidating his power in chapter 2. In this chapter, Solomon eliminates all vestiges of challenge to his position, eradicating rivals and those with questionable loyalties. While the Solomon of chapter 2 may seem bloodthirsty, the text allows one to argue that his actions come at David's behest and are therefore attributable to his father, not Solomon.³⁹

³⁷ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 250, 258, 265-266, 268; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 116-117, 125-127. See also, Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 53-55. Brueggemann contends that Nathan hatched the succession plot and that he and Bathsheba duped David, who had never promised the throne to Solomon, into believing that Adonijah had staged a coup when in reality he had done no such thing.

³⁸ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 254; Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 34.

³⁹ Gilad Sasson, מלך והדייט: יחסם של חז"ל לשלמה המלך [A King and Layman: The Sages' Attitude towards King Solomon] (Tel Aviv: Resling Publishing, 2013), 13.

Furthermore, the fact that Solomon is ultimately successful in gaining the throne and eliminating all challenges suggests that God approves of his succession.⁴⁰ However, David's instructions to avenge these enemies do not square with the rest of his parting instructions, which resound with Deuteronomistic piety. One wonders precisely how political vengeance is designed to conform to abiding by God's commandments and following in His ways.⁴¹ Nor does this message of vengeance sound like the David we know from the Book of Samuel. David had twice prevented Shimei ben Gera's death, yet he offers no explanation why he should be killed now.⁴² The Book of Samuel also lacks any indication that David bore lingering resentment toward Joab or Shimei that required resolution. Joab's killing of Abner and Shimei's disgrace of David had occurred years earlier, yet David has made no mention of these matters subsequently until now. Furthermore, David's purported orders to Solomon to settle these old scores are recorded as a private conversation, allowing the reader to question whether such a conversation, like David's promise to pass the throne on to Solomon, ever really took place.

Similarly, Adonijah's crime of presumptuousness in asking for Abishag, David's concubine, is construed as a gesture symbolic of trying to usurp the throne. However, this request also occurs in a private conversation with Bathsheba, of all people, the very woman who orchestrated Adonijah's downfall.⁴³ It is unclear why Adonijah would ask for Abishag given the risk of being seen as claiming the throne, just as it is unclear why Adonijah would approach

⁴⁰ Pauline A. Viviano, "Glory Lost: The Reign of Solomon in the Deuteronomist History," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 343.

⁴¹ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 59; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 132-134.

⁴² Menachem Naor, "קיום לדמותו של שלמה המלך (הצד השני של המטבע)" ["Observing the Image of King Solomon (the Other Side of the Coin)"], *Bet Mikra*, 36, no. 2 (1991): 117.

⁴³ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 253-254, 269-271, 274.

Bathsheba with such a request. The text allows for the possibility that perhaps Bathsheba capitalizes on the opportunity to do away with her son's rival. The text also allows for the possibility that perhaps she manufactures the request out of thin air.⁴⁴ Regardless, Solomon dispenses with due process and presumes Adonijah's guilt. Although Adonijah is meant to be seen as the victim of his own foolishness, the text allows for the possibility that he is merely a victim.⁴⁵

Just as Adonijah conveniently gives Solomon cause to kill him, so do Solomon's other enemies. In some cases, Solomon creates conditions for his adversaries to follow and kills them only after they have broken these conditions, validating Solomon's decision to kill these enemies. While the text thus provides justifications for the removal of these adversaries, the justifications are underwhelming.⁴⁶ In addition, Solomon's order to kill Joab on God's altar portrays him as especially ruthless and impious.⁴⁷ Solomon's immediate replacement of Joab with Benaiah makes the killing look all the more politically calculated.⁴⁸ Knapp surmises that the high profiles of the three victims of Solomon's political killings made them impossible for the text to ignore. Thus, an apologist narrator was left with no other choice than to justify the carnage. Even the hosting of the sons of Barzillai can be read as Solomon's effort to hold

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 61; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 139-140.

⁴⁵ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 141-142.

⁴⁶ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 47-48.

⁴⁷ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 258; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 147-149.

⁴⁸ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 149.

control over their home territory, the Gilead, by keeping this prominent family prisoner in Jerusalem.⁴⁹ At any rate, the text never states whether Solomon fulfilled this promise.⁵⁰

This political imprisonment is consistent with Solomon's initial detention in Jerusalem of Shimei, a prominent Benjaminite and Saulist supporter.⁵¹ Seibert notes that Solomon prohibited Shimei from crossing the Kidron (1 Kg. 2:37), which lies on the eastern edge of Jerusalem. Shimei's home in Bahurim sat just east of Jerusalem. When Shimei ultimately leaves Jerusalem to retrieve runaway slaves, he travels to Gath, which sits southwest of Jerusalem. Technically, Shimei never crosses the Kidron and, thus, never violates Solomon's stated conditions. Yet Solomon has him killed regardless.⁵² In the end, the text of Kings attempts to justify Solomon's cynical and brutal acts of self-preservation by appealing to David's glorious legacy and by portraying the killings as justified. Instead, the text paints a portrait of the seedy underpinnings of Solomon's reign.⁵³

This mixture of royal justification combined with Solomonic criticism within the same text defies simple explanation. Knapp argues that the sympathetic and critical materials do not match up with identifiable redactions levels of the underlying text. Rather, he finds them to be inextricably united. Thus, Knapp contends that the text was written as royal apologetic, but one that had to contend with well known criticism in order to justify Solomon's conduct. In other words, royal scribes had to contend with an unfavorable historical record and did their best to

⁴⁹ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 269, 272-273.

⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 63; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 135-136.

⁵¹ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 273; Naor, "קיום לדמותו של שלמה המלך (הצד השני של המטבע)", 117.

⁵² Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 152-153.

⁵³ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 118.

spin events in a positive light given the undeniable facts.⁵⁴ Seibert, noting the same phenomenon, attributes the mixture of favorable and critical material regarding Solomon in the succession narrative to subversive scribes. Royal scribes charged with writing royal apologetics as political propaganda preserved enough ambiguity in the text to preserve doubt as to Solomon's legitimacy. Seibert surmises that these scribes may have been Saulist sympathizers or secret supporters of Adonijah, or they may have preserved their subversive content out of covenantal piety. Since they were writing for a royal patron, they had to subtly hide their criticism within the text.⁵⁵ Ultimately, the text of Kings does not hide the fact that Solomon seizes the throne in a coup.⁵⁶

The succession narrative not only establishes the basis of Solomon's rule, but it has implications for the rest of the Solomon narrative. The succession narrative establishes that Solomon commands a certain degree of wisdom even before God grants him special wisdom at Gibeon. This wisdom manifests itself mostly as Machiavellian cunning.⁵⁷ This prompts the question of precisely what kind of wisdom God grants Solomon at Gibeon and how it differs from the wisdom Solomon already possesses. In addition, Solomon's succession in chapters 1-2 parallels Jeroboam's secession in chapters 11-12. Just as Solomon supplants Adonijah, Jeroboam supplants Rehoboam, both with the claim of divine sanction and aid.⁵⁸ Thus, Solomon's violent succession lays the seeds of the rupture of the monarchy at the end of his own

⁵⁴ Ibid., 258, 261-262.

⁵⁵ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 100-102, 128, 157, 182.

⁵⁶ Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, 265.

⁵⁷ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 48-49.

⁵⁸ Frisch, "Structure and Its Significance," 8-9.

reign.⁵⁹ Finally, it is important to note the nature of Solomon's character as it is portrayed in the succession narrative. For reasons unknown, scholarly treatments of Solomon often tend to ignore the succession narrative and its brutality.⁶⁰ It is my contention that Kings presents a critical view of Solomon, and the succession narrative sets the tone for his reign. One must deliberately ignore the succession narrative in order to view Solomon wholly positively until his downfall. As we shall see, that is precisely what many scholars do.

The Golden Age Approach

Several scholars view the narrative of Solomon's reign as divided into two distinct periods. Chapters 3-10 depict Solomon's "Golden Age," while chapter 11 records his downfall.⁶¹ This is not to say that Solomon is perfect in chapters 3-10. Even the most glowing representation of Solomon's Golden Age must concede that it was not perfect, because it eventually comes to an end.⁶² Few scholars argue that Solomon's Golden Age reaches any such level of perfection. Rather, Solomon's Golden Age can be viewed as a period of "theodicy

⁵⁹ In contrast, the Book of Samuel takes great pains to assure the reader that David plays no part in Saul's tragic end – he is abroad at the time. Furthermore, while David's potential rivals conveniently meet with violent deaths, the text is careful to exonerate David in every case, depicting him as solicitous to the welfare of Saul's remaining descendants. While one may read this with a dose of skepticism and dismiss these details as Davidic apologetics, one must consider the absence of those apologetics in Kings' depiction of Solomon's elimination of his enemies. Davidic apologetics serve to bolster the legitimacy of not just David but that of his dynasty. Yet Solomon, David's heir, receives no such defense.

⁶⁰ This is true for treatments of Solomon throughout history, beginning with Chronicles' complete omission of the succession narrative and continuing through modern scholarship, with many scholars focusing on Solomon's reign in chapters 3-10, as we will shortly see in the next section.

⁶¹ Roddy L. Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 92, no. 4 (Dec. 1973): 505; Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 22; David Jobling, "'Forced Labor': Solomon's Golden Age and the Question of Literary Representation," *Semeia*, 54 (1991): 59-60; Gary N. Knoppers, "Rehoboam in Chronicles: Villain or Victim?," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 109, no. 3 (Autumn, 1990): 426; J. Maxwell Miller, "Separating the Solomon of History from the Solomon of Legend," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2-3, 16; Sasson, *ט, ייךך ףלל*, 12; Zipora Talshir, "The Reign of Solomon in the Making: Pseudo-Connections between 3 Kingdoms and Chronicles," *Vetus Testamentum*, 50, no. 2 (Apr. 2000): 234; Viviano, "Glory Lost," 344.

⁶² Jobling, "'Forced Labor': Solomon's Golden Age," 58.

settlement,” the consensus that all is as it should be. This does not rise to the level of earthly perfection, because this view justifies any inequalities within society as divinely ordained. Thus, inequalities continue to exist. The break from this condition in chapter 11 marks a period of “theodicy crisis,” one which questions the inequalities and exploitation wrought by the status quo and invites radical change to social behaviors and institutions.⁶³ In this way, the depiction of Solomon’s reign as embodying a type of political and social ideal may merely serve to mask inequalities and injustice that persisted during his entire reign but emerged as problematic only toward the end of his monarchy.

In order for chapters 3-10 to portray a Golden Age, certain problematic elements in the text need to be rectified with the picture of Solomon as an ideal leader. Thus, Solomon’s marriages to foreign women, rather than being a source of concern, reflect the extent of his diplomatic relations, marriages being the basis for forming political alliances.⁶⁴ While 1 Kings 3:1 reports that Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh, it offers no condemnation of this action. The text offers no critique of Solomon’s marriages until chapter 11. Furthermore, Solomon’s marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh is juxtaposed with his love of God in verse 3:3.⁶⁵

Similarly, Solomon’s worship at shrines outside of Jerusalem in chapter 3 places no taint on the glory of his reign. Worship at shrines and high places, even outside of Jerusalem, was

⁶³ Walter A. Brueggemann, “The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 130-131.

⁶⁴ Collins, *Short Introduction*, 136; Viviano, “Glory Lost,” 343. Linda Scheearing notes that as scholarship continues to downgrade the historic geopolitical scope and grandeur of Solomon’s reign, the diplomatic significance of his marriages diminishes. See Linda S. Scheearing, “A Wealth of Women: Looking Behind, Within, and Beyond Solomon’s Story,” in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 436-437. This may be true from a historic perspective. From a literary perspective, however, the potential diplomatic significance of these marriages remains viable.

⁶⁵ Sasson, מלך ודדויט, 13-14, 91-92.

still permitted at this point early in Solomon's reign because the Temple had not yet been built.⁶⁶ Although the Ark had been brought to Jerusalem during David's reign, it had been in temporary storage for several years since its removal from Shiloh during the times of Samuel. As such, the tabernacle had not been in operation during that entire period of time. In fact, we see in the Book of Samuel repeated use of high places for worship of the God of Israel in a variety of locations. The Book of Samuel offers no condemnation for this mode of worship. Thus, there is a strong argument to be made that the mere continued worship at shrines and high places is not condemnatory of Solomon.⁶⁷

Elements of 1 Kings 4-5 use literary allusion to cast Solomon at the apex of Israelite history, as the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises, and perhaps even as a messianic figure. 1 Kings 4:20 reports that the people of "Judah and Israel were numerous like the sand upon the sea," thus fulfilling the promises God makes to Abraham (Gen. 22:17) and to Jacob (Gen. 32:13)⁶⁸ to give them descendants as numerous as the sands of the sea. Verse 5:1 describes the borders of Solomon's kingdom and rule as extending over "all the kingdoms from the River [Euphrates] through the land of the Philistines and until the border of Egypt." This sphere of influence is highly reminiscent of God's promise to Abraham that He would give Abraham's descendants dominion over all of the land "from the river of Egypt until the great river, the Euphrates River" (Gen. 15:18). 1 Kings 5:5 reports that Solomon's reign is marked by

⁶⁶ Carol A. Dray, *Translation and Interpretation in the Targum to the Book of Kings* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 107-108; Sasson, ע"י777י 7לל, 14; Viviano, "Glory Lost," 343.

⁶⁷ The text's emphasis that the practice continued because Solomon had not yet built the Temple may function as criticism for delaying the building of the Temple, but it does not necessitate a reading that criticizes the worship at high places in and of itself. This question will be addressed in the following section.

⁶⁸ In Genesis 32:13, it is actually Jacob who refers to this promise to him from God, which is not recorded separately in Genesis.

unprecedented safety and security, with “each man under his vine and under his fig tree.” This verse nearly quotes Micah 4:4’s messianic vision of peace and security and mimics the messianic vision of Zachariah 3:10, which describes the camaraderie that will prevail when “each man will call to his fellow under vine and under fig trees.”⁶⁹ It is in these textual references that proponents of Solomon’s Golden Age find the strongest standing. The picture of peace and perfection is almost hyperbolic, almost too good to be true. This material is not apologetic in the sense of trying to justify poor behavior or rationalize problematic language. Rather, it is unadulterated praise of the highest degree. Solomon is the realization of all of Israel’s aspirations and all of God’s promises.

Much of the material in Solomon’s Golden Age deals with the ideal economy he establishes. According to David Jobling, Solomon’s ideal economy sees all parties prosper, unlike a real economy in which there are economic winners and losers.⁷⁰ Solomon’s wisdom is seen as the engine of this ideal economy. Solomon’s wisdom is even quantified in terms of its value, as it produces 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (1 Kg. 5:12). Similarly, Solomon’s wisdom is portrayed as producing economic surplus through tribute offered by foreign powers who, like the Queen of Sheba, are impressed with Solomon’s famed wisdom. In chapter 11, this quantification of Solomon’s wisdom is replaced by a quantification of his wives.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Sasson, *מלך ומדינת*, 12-13.

⁷⁰ Jobling, “‘Forced Labor’: Solomon’s Golden Age,” 61-62. One might counter that “real” economics are complex and seldom manifest themselves in such a stark zero-sum-game. Healthy economies see greater prosperity for the most people, with fewer losers all around, at least for a time.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 64-66. Jobling contends that the Deuteronomist History is essentially pro-monarchy but that the Deuteronomists blamed Solomon’s downfall on his sexuality, which they could not countenance. In fact, the Deuteronomist History contains mixed material regarding monarchy. Given how closely Samuel’s description of the kingship (1 Sam. 8:11-18) resembles Solomon’s rule, it is hard to imagine Solomon’s reign being associated with any material more anti-monarchical. Furthermore, there is little evidence that the Deuteronomists were especially prudish. David has multiple wives. Only his relationship with Bathsheba is problematic because it is

While Solomon spends thirteen years on his palace and only seven years on the Temple, the smaller seven year span may not reflect lack of interest or sufficient effort. Rather, the seven year span connects Solomon's Temple to the Tabernacle, which took seven months to build, as well as the Second Temple, which, like Solomon's Temple, took seven years to build. Therefore, seven here acts as a typological number linking holy structures to the seven days of creation.⁷² Furthermore, one can argue that the disparity in years may reflect a greater diligence for completing the Temple, while his palace, like many a home renovation project, met with delays.

As with his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, the descriptions of Solomon's vast wealth and his massive collection of horses in chapters 5 and 10 are not presented as expressly critical of Solomon. Rather, these reports attest to the glory of his reign and the prosperity that he and Israel enjoyed during that period. Furthermore, Solomon's wealth was a gift from God, promised to him at Gibeon in reward for asking for wisdom instead of wealth (1 Kg. 3:13). It is difficult to imagine how God-ordained wealth could be sinful.⁷³

In this Golden Age approach, Solomon's wisdom is also viewed positively throughout chapters 3-10. It is only in Chapter 11 when his wisdom fails him.⁷⁴ Even if Solomon's sins stem from behaviors earlier in his reign, the text reserves criticism until the final chapter of the Solomon narrative. In so doing, the text creates the impression that Solomon's sins come only in

adulterous, not to mention that he essentially murders her husband. Solomon's sexuality poses a threat to his reign only to the extent he allows it to turn his heart to idol worship, which is the real problem.

⁷² Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Solomon Built the Temple and Completed It': Building the First Temple According to the Book of Kings," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, eds. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster, Ger.: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 284.

⁷³ Sasson, *מלך ודדו*, 14, 106-107; Viviano, "Glory Lost," 345.

⁷⁴ Sasson, *מלך ודדו*, 13; Martin A. Shields, *The End of Wisdom: A Reappraisal of the Historical and Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 9.

his old age, at the end of his life. This bifurcation of Solomon's reign into two parts, one marked by piety and prosperity, the other plagued by sin and downfall, serves the Deuteronomist message of retribution theology.⁷⁵ Indeed, the Deuteronomists valued loyalty to the God of Israel over all other commandments. David retains the throne despite his very serious sins of adultery and murder because his loyalty to God is unshakable. The Deuteronomists must account for the split in the united Davidic kingdom, and they find the cause in Solomon's idolatry. The Davidic dynasty loses control of the north because of Solomon's sins, but it retains control of the south because of David's faithfulness.⁷⁶ This line of argument allows for the possibility that Solomon's rule was not necessarily perfect in its earlier years. However, it argues that from a literary perspective, the Solomon narrative prefers to organize Solomon's reign in a way that creates the impression that all was well until Solomon's heart turned toward idol worship.

Thus, Jobling notes that all of the issues that plague Solomon in chapter 11 must have been there much earlier. Chapter 11 discusses Solomon's marriages to foreign women, but as we have already discussed, Solomon marries the daughter of Pharaoh back in chapter 3. In addition, Rehoboam, whose mother was an Ammonite woman, is forty-one years old at the beginning of his reign (1 Kg. 14:21).⁷⁷ It is highly likely that he was conceived even before Solomon became king. Hence, Solomon's marriages to foreign women begin long before chapter 11. Similarly,

⁷⁵ Sasson, *מלך דוד*, 14-15.

⁷⁶ Viviano, "Glory Lost," 338, 342, 345-346.

⁷⁷ To be fair, designation as an Ammonite may not establish her foreign status. A number of figures in the Deuteronomist History are identified as foreigners despite having prominent roles in Israelite society. For example, Doeg the Edomite is in charge of all of Saul's servants (1 Sam. 22:9) and Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 11:3) serves in David's army. These identifiers may not represent foreign nationality but rather serve as nicknames or indicators of geographic origins irrespective of nationality. See e.g. Metzudat Tzion, 1 Sam. 21:8, "The Edomite": "Since he used to live in Edom, but he was an Israelite by birth."

although the text tries to create an impression of prevailing peace during Solomon's Golden Age, we are told that Rezon was an adversary of Israel "all the days of Solomon" (1 Kg. 11:25). Thus, Kings exhibits a deliberate attempt to cleanse chapters 3-10 of material that would muddy Solomon's Golden Age despite the fact that those conditions must have existed throughout his reign.⁷⁸ As a result, many scholars who argue for a Solomonic Golden Age do not deny the existence of problems in Solomon's earlier career. Rather, they argue that the Solomon narrative is organized in such a way to create the impression that his reign was ideal until its later years.

The contention with unfavorable material earlier in the Solomon narrative prompts other responses from scholars embracing a Golden Age approach. In the face of troubling material about Solomon before chapter 11, some scholars differ on where the exact break between the two sections takes place. For example, Brettler sees the downfall of Solomon beginning at verse 9:26, which begins a discussion of Solomon's tremendous wealth. Brettler views this material as reflecting negatively on Solomon, especially given the prohibition against royal accumulation of wealth in Deuteronomy 17:17. While verses 9:26-10:29 may not have been originally composed with the intent to critique Solomon, their juxtaposition with the material in the beginning of chapter 11, thus completing the triumvirate of royal prohibitions, renders this material hostile to Solomon.⁷⁹ Similarly, Frisch sees the juxtaposition of the descriptions of Solomon's wealth and horses at the end of chapter 10 to the material on his foreign wives in the beginning of chapter 11 as deliberate in an effort to indicate Solomon's clear violation of the kingly prohibitions of Deuteronomy 17:14-20.⁸⁰ By this reasoning, Frisch would start the negative account of

⁷⁸ Jobling, "Forced Labor?: Solomon's Golden Age," 63-64.

⁷⁹ Brettler, "The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11," 89-90, 96-97.

⁸⁰ Frisch, "תיאור חטאי שלמה (מל"א י"א א-ה)", 173, 177.

Solomon's rule with verse 10:14, which begins a discussion of the vast amounts of wealth that came into Solomon's coffers.

An earlier break between the two sections of the Golden Age and the downfall not only recognizes the literary allusion to Deuteronomy 17 and the attendant implication imputing Solomon with violating the three kingly prohibitions, but it is also supported by chiasmic structures within Kings. The narrative sweep of Kings seems to be framed upon a chiasmic structure beginning with succession, a description of Solomon's loyalty to God, a description of Solomon's glory, Solomon's implementing the *corvée*, and arrangements for building the Temple, which are chiasmically paralleled by the dedication of the Temple, a second description of the *corvée*, another description of Solomon's glory plus his excesses, followed by his *disloyalty* to God, and ending with the schism. At the center of this structure lies the construction of the Temple, which is completed in chapter 9.⁸¹ When the Solomon narrative is viewed through this prism, any material appearing after the completion of the Temple must belong to the other side of the chiasmus, and thus must fall within the downward sweep of the narrative.

The parallel structures in Kings may also be a deliberate attempt by the editor to link Solomon's successes with fidelity to God. Kings both begins and ends with succession struggles, with intervention by a prophet, and with three named enemies of the crown. There are two parallel revelations, at Gibeon and during the dedication of the Temple. Solomon's love of God and his building of the Temple are paralleled by his love of foreign women and his building

⁸¹ Frisch, "Structure and Its Significance," 10-13; Jerome T. Walsh, "Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon," *Shofar*, 12, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 11-12, 14. Frisch maintains that the chiasmic structure serves to reinforce the Deuteronomist lesson that fidelity to God results in blessing and reward, while disloyalty to God results in punishment, namely the dissolution of a united Israel (14). Walsh essentially follows Frisch with some differences in the details of chiasmic structure of 1 Kings 1-11. In addition, Walsh is more willing to read negative foreshadowing into the earlier material of Solomon's Golden Age.

of shrines. His early reign describes Solomon's use of wisdom to create prosperity, while the latter part of his reign describes his use of wisdom for personal enrichment. Solomon has good relations with Hiram when he is building the Temple, but as soon as he moves to other projects, he begins to have disputes with Hiram, and the nature of the forced labor becomes more oppressive. Thus, as long as Solomon harmonizes his wisdom with fidelity to God's commandments, he is successful. As soon as Solomon veers from God's service and seeks to aggrandize himself, he becomes a violator of the law and disaster follows.⁸²

Some scholars who ascribe to the idea that the Solomon narrative is divided between a laudatory Golden Age and a condemning conclusion acknowledge the presence of critical material even earlier in the narrative. However they attribute the presence of that material to later redaction.⁸³ In this way, they preserve the clean divide between the parts of the Solomon narrative without resorting to arguments that construe negative material into benign or neutral material. At the same time, they essentially concede that the Solomon narrative contains material critical of Solomon throughout.

Solomon as Flawed From Start

While the Golden Age approach draws strength from much of the positive material in chapters 3-10 as well as the chiasmic structure of the narrative, it is often forced to ignore or explain away material that appears earlier in the Solomon narrative that is less friendly. In contrast to those proponents of a Golden Age, several scholars see evidence of Solomon's

⁸² Kim Ian Parker, "Repetition as a Structuring Device in 1 Kings 1-11," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 42 (1988): 21-25; Walsh, "Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon," 14-16, 18, 22-23. Again, Walsh agrees in many respects with Parker's structuring of the Solomon narrative in Kings, although he claims to prefer Frisch's approach (12).

⁸³ For example, see Brettler, "The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11," 89. Brettler argues that material in chapter 3 referring to both the popular and royal use of high places for worship (1 Kg. 3:2-3) is redactional.

perfidy long before Chapter 11.⁸⁴ Those scholars who find consistent, albeit subtle, references to Solomon's failings within the text also tend to see the Solomon narrative of Kings as a more unified text.⁸⁵ They need to resort less to redactional analysis to explain the coexistence of apologetic and critical material on Solomon. They also do not need to contend with explaining away troubling material when it appears in the wrong section of the narrative.

As discussed above, Solomon's problematic status begins from the moment of his birth. While Solomon is not directly born of David and Bathsheba's adulterous liaison, their marriage, which ultimately produces Solomon, is based on a foundation of covetousness, adultery, and murder.⁸⁶ Thus, it is surprising that God should love Solomon even from the moment of his birth (2 Sam. 12:24).⁸⁷ Still, it is possible that transgressive sexual origins are not dispositive. God does not hold improper relationships against David when He chooses him to be king. David descends from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter through his Moabite great-grandmother, Ruth. He also descends from the improper relationship between Tamar and her father-in-law, Judah, through his great-grandfather, Boaz.⁸⁸ Thus, Solomon's emergence

⁸⁴ See Yoav Barzilai, "ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג)" ["The Introduction to the Reign of Solomon (1 Kg. 3)"], *Megadim*, 11 (1990): 86, 91; Robert L. Cohn, "Characterization in Kings," in *The Book of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception*, eds. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 101; J. Daniel Hays, "Has the Narrator Come to Praise Solomon or to Bury Him? Narrative Subtleties in Kings 1-11," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 28, no.2 (2003): 154; Bruce Power, "All the King's Horses...': Narrative Subversion in the Story of Solomon's Golden Age," in *From Babel to Babylon: Essays on Biblical History and Literature in Honour of Brian Peckham*, eds. Joyce Rilett Wood, John E. Harvey, and Mark Leuchter (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 111.

⁸⁵ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 173-174.

⁸⁶ Power, "All the King's Horses," 115.

⁸⁷ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 50.

⁸⁸ The Torah lists sexual relations between a man and his daughter-in-law among forbidden relationships (Lev. 18:15) rendering it on a par with adultery and incest.

from the improper relationship between David and Bathsheba, albeit far more direct, is not necessarily disqualifying. However, it is not the most auspicious start.

Solomon is odd in the annals of kings up to that point. Unlike Saul or David, of whom the Book of Samuel offers insight into their characters, the Book of Kings never assigns Solomon a meaningful personality. Scripture never offers a physical description of Solomon as it does with both David and Saul. While Solomon is repeatedly described as wise, little else is said about him. Furthermore, while David and Saul are described at varying times as popularly loved, no such description pertains to Solomon, not even with his wives. The Book of Kings also offers the reader no insight into Solomon's emotions or thought processes. Kings does not describe his emotions, nor does it offer Solomon's thoughts or words in response to the events of his narrative.⁸⁹ He holds no conversations with his wives, with his children, or with prophets. He offers no response to God's later revelations. Even his interaction with the Queen of Sheba is one-sided, the Queen being the only one who speaks. Solomon's lack of strong characterization may serve to soften criticism of a failed king, by portraying him as inscrutable and subject to interpretation.⁹⁰ At the same time, the very notion that a problematic king requires vague description acts as a tacit admission there is something wrong that must be hidden. Solomon's lack of characterization has the effect of rendering him a puppet for the theological purposes of the authors of Kings. It makes him a type, rather than a fully fleshed character. This lack of character also allows later authors to impose varied characteristics on Solomon. This may be one of the more important contributing factors to Solomon's persistent popularity as well as to the gradual rehabilitation of his character from failed sinner to wise prophetic king.

⁸⁹ Cohn, "Characterization in Kings," 100-101; Stuart Lasine, *Knowing Kings: Knowledge, Power, and Narcissism in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2001), 129-132.

⁹⁰ Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 131-132, 140, 157.

One of the main problems with the Golden Age approach to Solomon is that it ignores the ugly details of Solomon's succession narrative, artificially beginning his Golden Age after he completely secures power.⁹¹ Yet, as we discussed in our examination of the succession narrative, problems abound. While Saul and David are specifically chosen by God, Solomon gains the throne through palace intrigue.⁹² Nothing in the succession narrative offers any justification for Solomon's ascension to the throne other than the purported will of God.⁹³ And even that is presumed by Solomon's ultimate success, not by any direct divine pronouncement. Furthermore, Solomon is unable to "establish" his kingdom until he settles all of his political scores.⁹⁴ Chapter 2 of Kings, as discussed above, paints a fairly ugly portrait of Solomon despite its attempts to justify his actions. The transition from chapter 2 to the glories of Solomon's Golden Age is stark, making no pretense of softening the shift in tone.

Many see Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh as an unmistakable signal that there is something wrong with Solomon's reign. This marriage marks the introduction of foreign influence in Jerusalem.⁹⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh evokes Egyptian beliefs in the divinity of the king and spurs thoughts of Egyptian servitude.⁹⁶ Here again, as we saw in Samuel's harsh retort to Israel's request for a king, we see allusions to slavery in Egypt. Because she comes up again in the very beginning of chapter 11, which depicts Solomon's downfall, the daughter of Pharaoh

⁹¹ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 43.

⁹² Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 158-159; Power, "All the King's Horses," 115.

⁹³ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 43-44.

⁹⁴ Power, "All the King's Horses," 117-118.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 118; Barzilai, "ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג)," 74; Cohn, "Characterization in Kings," 101; Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 161; Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 44.

⁹⁶ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 85-86.

“runs like a dark thread through the whole story.”⁹⁷ The mere fact that the text in Kings does not expressly condemn his marriage to her does not mean it condones the union.

1 Kings 3:2 blames Solomon for popular continued worship at shrines and high places.⁹⁸ Verse 3:2 reads as an accusation. It begins with the word רק, meaning “only” or “except.” Yes, Solomon will eventually build the Temple, “*except* the people continued to sacrifice at high places, because the House was not built for the Lord’s name yet in those days” (1 Kg. 3:2). While worship at shrines is permissible, and even though the people are worshipping the God of Israel in these places, the continued use of these shrines risks inviting the worship of foreign gods.⁹⁹ This feels especially problematic when it is the man who will ultimately build the Temple who is allowing the continued worship at shrines.¹⁰⁰ The verse implies that Solomon is less than diligent in pursuing his most important task.

While verse 3:3 affirms Solomon’s love for God, it does not employ the formulaic “and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord,” which is the final arbiter of whether a king is good or bad in the Book of Kings.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the parallel language that exists between 1 Kings 3:1-3 and 11:1-8, suggests the two excerpts are meant to be read together.¹⁰² Their parallel descriptions of Solomon’s love, the former for God, the latter for foreign women, suggest that Solomon’s love for God was not so whole-hearted. In this way, the text indicates that very early into his reign,

⁹⁷ Walsh, “Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon,” 24.

⁹⁸ Cohn, “Characterization in Kings,” 101; Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 45.

⁹⁹ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 45.

¹⁰⁰ Barzilai, “ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג),” 74.

¹⁰¹ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 162-164.

¹⁰² Barzilai, “ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג),” 86; Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel’s Ironic Icon*, 86; Frisch, “תיאור ‘חטאי שלמה (מל"א יא א-ה)”, 170.

Solomon bears the seeds of his own destruction. Solomon's divided heart results in his divided kingdom.¹⁰³

The location of Solomon's great revelatory experience is also problematic. Solomon's dream takes place in Gibeon instead of Jerusalem. This may have been political, honoring the rival tribe of Benjamin within whose territory Gibeon is located. Oddly, God's revelation never touches upon the Temple.¹⁰⁴ Rather, the dream seems to serve as a justification for Solomon's wealth and power. Furthermore, God's message in the dream contains material that foreshadows his downfall. All of Solomon's revelatory experiences contain language that makes God's blessings conditional on Solomon's adherence to God's commandments, and all invoke "David your father" as a model of obedience (1 Kg. 3:14, 6:12, 9:4-9, 11:11-13).¹⁰⁵ Even at this early stage in his reign, God needs to remind Solomon to follow His law. The consistent literary connections between all of these revelatory excerpts serve to create continuity throughout Solomon's reign that builds up to Solomon's ultimate betrayal of God.

God's granting Solomon wisdom is puzzling since Solomon never seems to learn from his experiences or grow in character over the course of Kings. Nor does the Book of Kings specify precisely what kind of wisdom he has. Solomon's wisdom is quantified by the number of proverbs and songs he composes but is never really described. The text never provides examples. Solomon remains an empty personality throughout his narrative in Kings.¹⁰⁶ Solomon's wisdom does not seem covenantal in nature. It manifests itself in his policies, which

¹⁰³ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 45-46. 94.

¹⁰⁴ Barzilai, "ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג)," 75, 79.

¹⁰⁵ Walsh, "Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon," 12-13.

¹⁰⁶ Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 132-134.

expand Israel's interests beyond their borders. Solomon's wisdom has more to do with statecraft and the furthering of his own reputation than with genuine wisdom.¹⁰⁷ But as we saw in the succession narrative, Solomon already possesses this type of political wisdom before his revelatory experience at Gibeon. Furthermore, the very act of requesting wisdom instead of riches or power requires a fair amount of wisdom. Thus, how Solomon has benefitted from God's gift is far from clear.

Nor has Solomon done anything that seems to justify God's offering to fulfill his any request, leading the reader to wonder whether the offer is really a test. Solomon's request for wisdom is puzzling since the text indicates both implicitly (through his political maneuvers in chapter 2) and explicitly (1 Kg. 2:6, 2:9) that he already has wisdom. Perhaps his request embodies a different type of wisdom. Solomon asks for wisdom in order to judge God's people, "for who can judge Your heavy nation?" (1 Kg. 3:9). In so doing, he invokes Moses, who also had difficulty judging the entire nation (Ex. 18:13-18). However, Solomon requests precisely the ability that eludes Moses. In so doing, he seeks to be greater than Moses. According to Yoav Barzilai, Solomon is asking for God-like powers, for only God can judge the entire nation. Furthermore, Solomon's desire to understand between good and evil (1 Kg. 3:9) alludes to the Tree of Knowledge between Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden narrative. Solomon's desire to understand between good and evil is a request to become like God (Gen. 3:5).¹⁰⁸ In this reading, Solomon is offered one wish. His request for wisdom, rather than revealing himself as wise or humble, actually reveals unbridled ambition and arrogance.

¹⁰⁷ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 111, 118-119.

¹⁰⁸ Barzilai, "ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג)," 75, 87-88.

Barzilai's depiction of Solomon's attempt to gain God-like powers, to even rival God, is compelling. However, Barzilai fails to adequately explain why God applauds and grants Solomon's request. One possible response is to speculate that perhaps God did not actually grant Solomon any additional wisdom. God does tell Solomon, "Here, I have given you a wise and understanding heart the like of yours was never before you and after you will not arise like you" (1 Kg. 3:12). Since God's words are rendered in the past tense, God may have already given Solomon a wise heart before his request without adding to that wisdom subsequently. Nor does God's assurance of the uniqueness of Solomon's wisdom necessarily imply that this wisdom would surpass all wisdom before or after, just that it would be distinguishable from the wisdom of all others. Furthermore, the text never claims that Solomon suddenly commands powers of the mind that he heretofore had not accessed. He does not resolve the case of the two prostitutes in a way that was beyond the capabilities of the Solomon of chapter 2. If anything, his solution's potential for brutality is highly reminiscent of that Solomon.

There is little objective evidence in the text of Kings that Solomon is actually the beneficiary of a unique brand of divine wisdom. If so, then we are left with two alternatives. On the one hand, this purported gift may be manufactured propaganda designed to impart divine approval on the Solomon regime. As Brueggemann argues, the revelation at Gibeon can be read simply and cynically as a justification for Solomon's great wealth and power. Solomon never asked for these things; they were divinely granted.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, perhaps God merely suggests to Solomon that he has received divinely gifted wisdom in order to see how he will behave. In this way, God's "gift" of wisdom serves as a fascinating divine test, which Solomon ultimately fails. Along these lines, Stuart Lasine also posits that God's blessing Solomon with

¹⁰⁹ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 75.

wisdom, wealth, and power functions as a test. Normally, God tests humans by subjecting them to suffering. However, blessing can also form the basis of a test. In this sense, Lasine presumes that God does in fact grant Solomon his requested wisdom. In Solomon's case, God grants him with an abundance of wisdom, wealth, power, and peace. The Solomon of Kings fails the test, and turns to other gods despite these blessings.¹¹⁰

One may construe Solomon's request for wisdom with less cynicism. Solomon's request for wisdom operates as a tacit admission that his previous attempts at wisdom, more Machiavellian cunning than wisdom, have been insufficient.¹¹¹ P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. distinguishes between an older conception of wisdom and that of the Deuteronomists. In the underlying narrative, Solomon is graced with cunning, shrewdness, and discernment. However, for the Deuteronomists, all of these skills can be learned. The Deuteronomists distinguish true wisdom from amoral cleverness. Solomon's divine gift of wisdom, in contrast, consists of the wisdom to judge and rule properly. The Deuteronomists constrain this divinely granted wisdom by making it contingent upon observance of God's commandments and adherence to His Torah.¹¹² Or alternatively, one can argue that Solomon's wisdom, while he does have it, is self-delusional. It does not preserve the kingdom. Rather, Solomon's reliance on his own wisdom leads to the kingdom's downfall.¹¹³ This sin of pride, of egotistical reliance on his own wisdom, is a theme that will recur in various treatments of Solomon over the ages. Making the benefits of wisdom conditional upon covenantal piety provides an explanation as to how the wisest of all

¹¹⁰ Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 162-165.

¹¹¹ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 47-48.

¹¹² P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "The Sage in the Deuteronomist History," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 290, 292-293.

¹¹³ Brueggemann, "The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom," 128.

men could sin. The same applies to blaming Solomon's sin on his pride in his own wisdom. In either case, wisdom, even divinely gifted wisdom, is no panacea to sin and can easily be overcome by temptation or arrogance.

Even Solomon's famous display of wisdom in his judgment over the baby can be seen in a dark light. While his cunning does identify the more suitable mother, Solomon's judgment of the two prostitutes does not, however, necessarily identify the baby's biological mother.¹¹⁴ This, of course, may be the preferred outcome. However, the fact that the two mothers in the case are both prostitutes reveals that Solomon's reign is not a golden ideal, since prostitution persists and seems accepted.¹¹⁵ Solomon arrives at his decision more through cunning than wise jurisprudence. This is the same kind of wisdom Solomon utilized to secure his throne. Just as with his treatment of his enemies, Solomon demonstrates his God-like power to decide life and death. He can kill or save the baby according to his whim. Furthermore, as Barzilai posits, the near killing of the baby is reminiscent of the Akeidah and Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac. In Solomon's orchestrated Akeidah, Solomon plays the role of God by deciding the fate of the child. It seems that Solomon's real goal in this judgment is to publicize his own wisdom. And it works. While the Akeidah results in Abraham's fear of God (Gen. 22:12), Solomon's judgment results in the people fearing Solomon (1 Kg. 3:28).¹¹⁶

1 Kings 5 begins with an idyllic description of peace and prosperity, but verses 6-8 shift suddenly to a description of Solomon's massive horse holdings. This hyperbolic description points to Solomon's violation of Deuteronomy 17:16's prohibition against the king's multiplying

¹¹⁴ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 58-59.

¹¹⁵ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 164.

¹¹⁶ Barzilai, "ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג)," 76, 88, 94-96.

horses, an issue that will be revisited with equally fantastic numbers in 1 Kings 10.¹¹⁷ Again, by creating a literary connection between material earlier in Solomon's reign and material associated with his downfall, the text invites the reader to view the two descriptions in light of each other. While the description of horses in chapter 5 is made without condemnation, its recurrence in chapter 10 with Solomon's other excesses invites reevaluation of his earlier accumulations.

Even the building of the Temple itself bears references to forced labor, invoking Egyptian servitude.¹¹⁸ This theme is echoed in the report of Solomon's store cities (1 Kg. 9:19), which are reminiscent of the store cities the Israelites built for Pharaoh in Egypt (Ex. 1:11).¹¹⁹ His system of labor is enforced by Solomon's burgeoning bureaucracy and military.¹²⁰ The theme of Solomon as Pharaoh and imposer of Egypt-like servitude is raised again in chapter 11. Solomon effectively becomes Pharaoh, and Jeroboam, filling the role of Moses, must flee to Egypt (1 Kg. 11:40) and return in order to free the Israelites from their servitude.¹²¹ Similarly, another challenger, Hadad the Edomite, also fills the Moses role by escaping the destruction of all the Edomite males, staying in Midian, and ultimately fleeing to Egypt (1 Kg. 11:14-18).¹²² As with Samuel's rebuke to Israel and Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, Solomon is cast as the new Pharaoh, but one who enslaves his own people.

¹¹⁷ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 59-60.

¹¹⁸ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 126; Hannan Gafni, "מלכות שלמה – הכישלון וגומריו" ["The Reign of Solomon – the Downfall and its Causes"], *Megadim*, 31 (2000): 89; Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 165, 167-168, 172; Power, "All the King's Horses," 119.

¹¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 127; Gafni, "מלכות שלמה – הכישלון וגומריו," 90.

¹²⁰ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 127-129.

¹²¹ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 95.

¹²² Gafni, "מלכות שלמה – הכישלון וגומריו," 87-88.

Even beyond the literary allusions to Egyptian servitude, the text reveals that the levy of forced labor is despised by the laborers. After Solomon's death, they complain bitterly to Rehoboam about the burden Solomon placed upon them (1 Kg. 12:3-4), and they even stone to death Adoram, the supervisor over the levy (1 Kg. 12:18). Solomon's implementation of taxation on the people to support royal expenses is exacerbated by the fact that the tribe of Judah seems to be excluded from the burden (1 Kg. 4:7-19). Hence, Solomon's policies invite resentment and secession.¹²³ From a practical perspective, it is this more than any other Solomonic excess that causes the secession of the north from the unified kingdom. While the text blames the dissolution on Solomon's idolatry, the triggering cause is Solomon's onerous taxation and forced labor policies. These policies emerge early within Solomon's reign, as he institutes them in preparation for building the Temple.

Solomon expends more time on the building of his personal palace than he does on God's Temple.¹²⁴ For Barzilai, the attention spent on Solomon's palace puts it in competition with the Temple. Similarly, Solomon's extravagant throne rivals the Temple's Holy of Holies. Thus, Solomon positions himself as a rival to God.¹²⁵ Even once he completes the Temple, Solomon delays its dedication for at least eleven months without any explanation.¹²⁶ The implication may be that the Temple's dedication was delayed by work on Solomon's palace.¹²⁷ Furthermore, given God's response to David's offer to build Him a house (2 Sam. 7:5-7), it is not clear that

¹²³ Naor, "קיום לדמותו של שלמה המלך (הצד השני של המטבע)", 113, 115.

¹²⁴ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 168; Power, "All the King's Horses," 115, 119; Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 44-45, 69.

¹²⁵ Barzilai, "ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג)", 88, 90.

¹²⁶ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 169; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 162.

¹²⁷ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 70.

God really wants or needs a Temple, much less such an extravagant one.¹²⁸ Thus, the Temple may serve more to acclaim the glory of Solomon and legitimize his power than it serves the worship of the God of Israel. Solomon's installation of the Ark of the covenant in the Temple further serves to exploit covenantal theology to promote and legitimize royal theology, recasting God as a patron of the king.¹²⁹ However, God's communications with Solomon during construction and the dedication lay plain that God is more concerned with obedience than architectural splendor.¹³⁰ God's message to Solomon at the dedication of the Temple constitutes a warning not to abandon His commandments by worshipping other gods lest the Temple be destroyed. This warning foreshadows Solomon's sins and the Temple's ultimate destruction.¹³¹ Solomon presages his own sinfulness in his dedicatory prayer by stating, "for there is no man who does not sin" (1 Kg. 8:46).¹³² In this way, the text plants the seeds of the Temple's destruction just as the Temple is being completed at the apex of Solomon's achievements.¹³³

In addition, Solomon runs into economic problems. While earlier descriptions of Solomon's wealth were reflected in national well-being, the later descriptions of Solomon's wealth seem to benefit only the king and his royal court.¹³⁴ It is this extravagance that invokes

¹²⁸ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 166-167.

¹²⁹ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 73, 91-93, 130-131.

¹³⁰ Walsh, "Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon," 22-23.

¹³¹ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 76; Cohn, "Characterization in Kings," 101; Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 170; Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 83; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 14.

¹³² Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 171.

¹³³ Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 83.

¹³⁴ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 133; Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 85.

the dire warnings Samuel issues regarding the excesses of a human king (1 Sam. 8:10-18).¹³⁵ Solomon's massive building projects cause him to overtax and overspend, mistakes that pose a challenge to his perceived reputation for wisdom.¹³⁶ Solomon's debts force him to give away portions of Israelite territory to Hiram.¹³⁷ This loss of land is unthinkable in light of the fact that loss of the Promised Land is how God punishes Israel in both Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic theology. Hiram's ability to alter the terms of their deals implies that Hiram is more powerful than Solomon. Hiram essentially exacts tribute from Solomon, rendering Solomon his vassal.¹³⁸ Solomon's policies of taxation and forced labor will ultimately culminate in the tax rebellion and secession after his death.¹³⁹

The Queen of Sheba story is usually viewed as laudatory toward Solomon. Hearing of his awesome wisdom, the queen comes to see for herself. The text seems to imply that he satisfies her expectations: "2. ...and she came to Solomon, and she spoke to him of everything that was on her heart. 3. And Solomon told her of all her matters; no matter was hidden from the king that he did not tell her" (1 Kg. 10:2-3).¹⁴⁰ However, her extolling of Solomon comes specifically after she has surveyed the extravagance of his palace and his court (1 Kg. 10:4-5). Even her glowing praise questions the value of Solomon's reign to the Israelite people when she

¹³⁵ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 87.

¹³⁶ James L. Kugel. *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 504.

¹³⁷ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 171; Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 173-176; Walsh, "Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon," 23.

¹³⁸ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 168, 177.

¹³⁹ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 134.

¹⁴⁰ There is nothing in the scriptural text that mentions riddles, although the text does not exclude such a possibility. The text does not reveal the substance of their exchange and thus gives us little insight into the nature of Solomon's wisdom and what about it the Queen of Sheba was praising. As is so common with Solomon's wisdom, we hear much about it and see little of it.

praises his wisdom solely in the sense of its benefit to his men and courtiers (1 Kg. 10:8). She omits mentioning any benefit to Solomon's subjects.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the Queen's parting remarks about the king's role in executing "justice and righteousness" (1 Kg. 10:9) can be read as a stinging criticism.¹⁴² Ironically, the Queen of Sheba invokes God's blessings, rendering her a voice of covenantal theology, in contrast to Solomon himself.¹⁴³

As we have previously discussed, the most obvious of Solomon's flaws are his flagrant violations of the three kingly prohibitions listed in Deuteronomy 17: The king cannot have too many horses, wives, and wealth (Deut. 17:16-17).¹⁴⁴ His systematic violation of these prohibitions turns Solomon into the antithesis of the ideal Deuteronomic king.¹⁴⁵ The accumulation of horses, especially war horses, is especially problematic, because it demonstrates a lack of faith in God, who is supposed to be the true source of Israel's might.¹⁴⁶ Hannan Gafni argues that Deuteronomy 17:16's warning not to return the people to Egypt is not a prohibition but a consequence of accumulating horses. The massive numbers of horses Solomon purchases and houses create financial burdens that essentially enslave the populace in a manner similar to Egyptian servitude. This connection with Egyptian servitude is also made through Solomon's wives since the daughter of Pharaoh is the only one of Solomon's foreign wives to be identified individually. While Egypt's downfall begins with the infant Moses being taken by the daughter

¹⁴¹ Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 87.

¹⁴² Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 177-178.

¹⁴³ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 120-121.

¹⁴⁴ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 156-157, 173.

¹⁴⁵ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 179.

¹⁴⁶ Gafni, "הכישלון וגומרי" – מלכות שלמה," 92; Karl. W. Weyde, "The Narrative of King Solomon and the Law of the King: On the Kingship between 1 Kings 3-11 and Deut. 17:14-20," in *Enigmas and Images: Studies in Honor of Tryggve N. D. Mettinger*, eds. Göran Eidevall and Blaženka Scheuer (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 85-86.

of Pharaoh, Israel's downfall begins with Solomon's taking the daughter of Pharaoh.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, one may counter the claim that Solomon's multiple marriages to foreign women were diplomatic in nature with the indication in 1 Kings 11:2 that Solomon loved these women and married them for love, not politics.¹⁴⁸ While the Deuteronomistic History may not be as concerned with these particular violations as is Deuteronomy itself, the obvious allusion to them cannot be read in any way that is not critical.¹⁴⁹

Overall, the picture of Solomon's reign is one marked from the start with a top-heavy bureaucracy, one overseeing forced labor for extravagant building projects, and one draining extensive resources for the upkeep of the royal household. These conditions realize in close detail the dire warnings the prophet Samuel delivers to Israel upon its request for a king (1 Sam. 8:11-18).¹⁵⁰ For those scholars who see repeated hints within the first ten chapters of Kings to Solomon's ultimate downfall, the so-called Golden Age of Solomon represents what might have been rather than historical reality.¹⁵¹ In this sense, the two approaches begin to converge. Most proponents of the Golden Age concede that the Golden Age is an artificial division created to confer the impression of an ideal kingdom rather than representing historical reality. While my sympathies lie with the approach that reads Solomon as flawed from the beginning, in either case Solomon's end is the same. Even if one argues for a genuine Solomonic Golden Age, his spectacular fall from grace taints all of his prior achievements.

¹⁴⁷ Gafni, "מלכות שלמה – הכישלון וגומריה," 91-93.

¹⁴⁸ Frisch, "תיאור חטאי שלמה (מ"א יא א-ח)," 170; Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 156.

¹⁴⁹ Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative*, 180.

¹⁵⁰ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 165.

¹⁵¹ Power, "All the King's Horses," 121.

Positive or Negative Portrait

Clearly, Solomon's sins and subsequent downfall mar his reign. However, does the ending of his narrative inalterably render Solomon unredeemable? If so, how do we account for much of the apologetic material that makes its way into the Solomon narrative? Some of this apologetic material appears surprisingly even in chapter 11. 1 Kings exhibits apologetic tendencies in its overall treatment of Solomon that suggest that while Solomon is highly flawed, he is not irrevocably evil. Obviously, there is something good about Solomon that the redactors of Kings sought to preserve. Yet, the Solomon narrative ends in such a way that there is little that can be said to defend the fallen king.

1 Kings offers an “outstandingly complex and variegated” description of Solomon and his reign.¹⁵² Whether one views Solomon's career as a Golden Age followed by a precipitous fall, or as flawed from the start, Solomon's wisdom is called into question. While we have noted that his wisdom does not save him from sin at the end of his reign, it is also interesting to note that the rest of the Book of Kings drops the subject of wisdom entirely. After Solomon, it evaluates kings by their obedience to the law, never by their wisdom.¹⁵³ Thus, Solomon leaves two self-contradictory legacies, one as wise king and builder of the Temple, and the other as the archetype of the disobedient king.¹⁵⁴ The tension between the two Solomons is seen in language in chapter 11. While Solomon is castigated for abandoning God and “doing evil in the eyes of God” (1 Kg. 11:6), his life ends with somewhat more positive language: “And the rest of the

¹⁵² Talshir, “The Reign of Solomon in the Making,” 233.

¹⁵³ Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 10. See David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 49. Meade sees Kings as preserving a very old tradition associating Solomon with wisdom. Since wisdom was not of special interest to the Deuteronomists, the issue is not mentioned again in the Deuteronomist History.

¹⁵⁴ Barzilai, “ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג),” 76-77.

matters of Solomon and all he did, *and his wisdom*, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of Solomon?" (1 Kg. 11:41). At the very end of his life, the Book of Kings is still lauding Solomon for his wisdom, despite its inability to save him from sin.

It is interesting to note that Solomon's achievements are reflected in his interactions with women: Bathsheba helps secure his throne, he demonstrates his wisdom through the case of the two prostitutes, the Queen of Sheba tests his wisdom, and his downfall is paved by his foreign wives. Women become foils for Solomon's wisdom.¹⁵⁵ While Solomon's reign is punctuated by his interactions with women, his reign is not marked by romance or sex scandals until the final chapter. In chapter 11, Solomon's multiple marriages bring about his downfall.¹⁵⁶ This prominent use of women may serve to emasculate Solomon. Unlike David, Solomon is not a celebrated warrior. His reign is marked by peace, which is usually seen as positive. However, the text also seems to suggest that Solomon is soft, that the influence of women in his life robs him of his masculine prowess. This feminine influence sets the stage for his ultimate downfall when he allows his wives to sway his heart. He lacks the manliness to stand up to their influences, allowing them to lead him to idolatry.

The chiasmic structure of the Solomon narrative in Kings also invites the reader to contrast the two sides of that structure and to read each of its sides in light of the other. This particular reading of 1 Kings 1-11, as Kim Parker argues, views the Solomon narrative as a cohesive unit rather than a pastiche of redaction layers. If one approaches Kings with a literary perspective rather than a historic perspective, one finds a deliberately vague portrait of Solomon, who is depicted on one hand as the wise king and Temple builder, and on the other as a tyrant

¹⁵⁵ Frederick E. Greenspahn, "A Typology of Biblical Women," *Judaism*, 32, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 49-50.

¹⁵⁶ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 149-150.

and sinner.¹⁵⁷ Everything following the completion of the Temple becomes a darker version of what preceded. By linking Solomon's downfall to his earlier achievements, the later material taints the earlier material implicitly criticizing Solomon's entire reign.¹⁵⁸ By the same token, the very fact that the dark side of the chiasmus has a corresponding light side allows one to view Solomon as embodying both good and bad within the same character.

Frisch discusses the recurrent wordplay that appears throughout the Solomon narrative, especially plays on Solomon's name. At first, the variations on the name Solomon, שלמה, have positive connotations of peace, שלום (1 Kg. 5:4, 5:26), wholeness, שלם (7:51, 9:25), Solomon's offering of peace-offerings, שלמים (3:15, 9:25) in the Temple, and the primacy of Jerusalem, ירושלים (3:15, 8:1). These plays on Solomon's name recur later in the narrative, creating a point of contrast, and thus subtle criticism of Solomon at the end of his reign. Solomon's heart is no longer whole, שלם (11:4). He builds shrines to foreign gods next to Jerusalem, ירושלים (11:7). The symbol of Solomon's loss of the kingdom is a garment, שְׁלֵמָה (11:29), which the prophet Ahijah tears to pieces, this scene taking place just outside of Jerusalem. This reworking of Solomon's name tracks his descent from his promising potential to his disastrous ending, emphasizing his transformation from a faithful follower of God to the king who establishes idol worship in Jerusalem.¹⁵⁹

One question that will emerge from the Solomon narrative is just how committed Solomon was to his wives' idolatry. While chapter 11 seems pretty clear that "his wives turned his heart to other gods" (1 Kg. 11:4), that "he went after Ashtoret" and other foreign gods (1 Kg.

¹⁵⁷ Parker, "Repetition as a Structuring Device," 19-20.

¹⁵⁸ Frisch, "Structure and Its Significance," 13-14.

¹⁵⁹ Amos Frisch, "Midrashic Derivations of Solomon's Name in the Book of Kings," *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World*, no. 1 (1999): 95, 93-88, 84.

11:5), and that he “did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (1 Kg. 11:6), the text does not unequivocally state that he offered sacrifices to these gods or that he directly worshipped them in any specified way. As if in anticipation and rejection of the possible argument for Solomon’s minimal participation in idolatry, the text addresses Solomon’s true loyalties:

1. And King Solomon loved many foreign women and the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites. 2. From the nations about which the Lord said to the children of Israel: ‘You shall not go among them, and they shall not go among you, because they will turn your hearts after their gods,’ to them did Solomon adhere with love (1 Kg. 11:1-2).

To whom did Solomon adhere? Verse 11:2 would seem to refer to his foreign wives, not to their gods. However, the verse utilizes the masculine plural **בהם** for “to them,” instead of the feminine plural, **בהן**. This shift suggests that Solomon did not cleave only to his wives, but to their foreign gods, who are mentioned in the verse as well.¹⁶⁰

Despite this damning material, we see an exegetical effort to mitigate the severity of Solomon’s sins even within chapter 11. Verses 7-8 depict Solomon building shrines for his wives’ foreign gods, yet only the wives are depicted as actively worshipping there, as witnessed by the use of feminine plural: **מקטירות ומזבחות לאלהיהן**, “they offered incense and offered sacrifices to their gods” (1 Kg. 11:8). This allows for the possibility that Solomon merely facilitated their worship but did not directly participate himself despite the implications of the earlier verses in chapter 11.¹⁶¹ In verse 33, the prophet Ahijah informs Jeroboam that God has decided to divide the kingdom “because *they* have abandoned Me, and *they* have prostrated to Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the children of

¹⁶⁰ Frisch, “תיאור חטאי שלמה (מל"א י"א א-ה)”, 172.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 175-176.

Ammon; and *they* have not walked in My ways, to do what is right in My eyes, and to keep My statutes and My ordinances, like David his father.” While the subject of the verse is obviously Solomon, as evidenced by the reference to “David his father,” the pronouns are switched from the singular to the plural, obscuring Solomon’s sole culpability.¹⁶² Rather, it is the people as a whole, not just their king, who have abandoned God. This move may serve to resolve the troubling aspects of Israel’s collective punishment for Solomon’s personal sins. However, it may also represent an effort to minimize Solomon’s culpability for idolatrous behavior.

Despite these textual efforts to soften Solomon’s sins, other aspects of the text are less favorable in the final calculation. God’s rebuke to Solomon in verse 11:11, informing Solomon that God will tear the kingdom from him and give it to his servant, parallels God’s rebuke to Saul and the promise to tear the kingdom from him and give it to his fellow (15:28), thus creating a literary connection between Solomon and Saul.¹⁶³ This juxtaposition establishes Solomon as a failed king just as Saul was a failed king. In addition, Solomon is punished with warfare, adversaries, rebellion, and ultimately the split of the kingdom. Solomon dies without any indication of remorse or atonement.¹⁶⁴ In this respect, Solomon does not measure up to his father, David. When confronted with the severity of his sins against Uriah, David confesses his guilt with no attempt to justify his behavior (2 Sam. 12:13). Saul, too, admits his sin of not completely obeying God’s orders when confronted by the prophet Samuel, although he does attempt to mitigate his own guilt by blaming the people (1 Sam. 15:24). Yet when God confronts Solomon with his sins, Solomon is silent.

¹⁶² Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 72-73. Fishbane attributes the change to scribal emendation as evidenced by retention of the singular in both 1 Kings 11-13 and in the Septuagint.

¹⁶³ Provan. *1 & 2 Kings*, 92, 95.

¹⁶⁴ Braun, “Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles,” 506.

Later references to Solomon in the Book of Kings also reflect a negative view of the failed monarch. Outside of the context of his or his son's narrative, all the mentions of Solomon in Kings come with negative connotations. Most of the references (1 Kg. 14:26; 2 Kg. 21:7, 24:13, 25:16) associate him with the Temple and its appurtenances, but in all of these, it is in the context of the Temple and its treasures being sacked, defiled, or destroyed. The sole other mention of Solomon in the Book of Kings is a description of how Josiah, as part of his program of religious reform, destroys the shrines that Solomon had built for a variety of foreign gods (2 Kg. 23:13). Thus, Solomon is remembered for his enduring legacy of idol worship and his disappearing legacy of the Temple. The Book of Kings does not remember Solomon fondly.

This should not be surprising. Scriptural figures are seldom depicted as perfect. Even Moses sins, yet some sins are more serious than others. While David commits adultery and murder, very serious sins in and of themselves, he regrets his conduct and suffers punishment for it. Solomon, on the other hand, never seems to repent. And his sin, under the influence of his foreign wives, undermines his commitment to God at its very core. As Steven Weitzman correctly notes, Solomon's worship of his foreign wives' gods constitutes the "deepest possible betrayal of God" and "the worst possible sin that an Israelite could commit."¹⁶⁵ In turn, in Deuteronomic theology, the abandonment of Torah and covenantal fidelity leads to the loss of land, in this case, the secession of the northern kingdom. From this standpoint alone, Solomon is a dismal failure. Solomon marks the beginning of the end for Israel, the first loss of land that will culminate with the end of the Davidic dynasty and the Babylonian exile.¹⁶⁶ Thus, in the final analysis, despite its deliberately vague depiction of Solomon, Kings renders a guilty verdict,

¹⁶⁵ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 12, 153.

¹⁶⁶ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 147, 149, 152, 157.

condemning Solomon to the most unforgivable of sins, which sets the tone for the gradual decline of the Israelite polity.

While we have devoted much space to the literary analysis of Kings' depiction of Solomon, this analysis provides a backdrop for all further discussion. First, the portrait of Solomon in Kings is, at the very least, nuanced. Solomon is not presented as perfect, nor is he entirely evil. Rather, Solomon is a king with tremendous potential for greatness who fails to meet this promise and falls tragically to sin. Whether this mixed portrait is the result of the preservation of opposing traditions or political positions, or merely the final redaction of an editor who sought to present a more nuanced character study, we are left with a Solomon who is all the more human for embodying both positive and negative traits. In this sense, the Solomon of Kings falls within the general scriptural tendency within Tanakh to portray its protagonists as humans whose positive qualities coexist with their less attractive traits. In terms of the development of Jewish exegesis, it is important to note this tendency and to mark the degree to which subsequent exegetical treatments veer from this more human portrayal of biblical figures in an effort to defend them from criticism.

In addition, I contend that while the Book of Kings reflects material that is positive and apologetic toward Solomon, the overall impression created by the text is negative. This conclusion is cemented by the inescapable conclusion of the Solomon narrative in Kings. If Kings functions as the source for the scriptural Solomon tradition, then it is the template against which all subsequent traditions must be compared. Or as Fishbane might express it, the Solomon narrative in Kings is the *traditum* to which the *traditio* responds or from which it departs. If the *traditum* offers a negative portrayal of Solomon, then any subsequent *traditio* that offers a more

positive depiction of Solomon is, in fact, departing from the source tradition, inviting us to consider how and why.

Given our conclusion that Kings treats Solomon as sinful, one might expect the discussion of Solomon to end there. Solomon should have emerged as the model of failed kings. Yet, rather than being the dark counterpoint to his father, David, Solomon is often lauded alongside David as the iconic kings of Israel. How could Solomon's reputation survive the tarnishing it suffers in Kings? Of course, Kings is not the final biblical word on Solomon. Solomon appears in a number of other biblical books, where his treatment varies from that of Kings. As we shall soon see, Chronicles paints a very different portrait of Solomon. Yet this prompts the question of how Chronicles could pull such a feat. If Solomon is so irretrievably sinful, how can Chronicles even think to portray him any differently? It would seem that despite the finality of its verdict against Solomon, Kings incorporates enough laudatory and apologetic material while leaving Solomon's character vague, that more positive portrayals of Solomon are still viable. Despite his ignoble end, Solomon is still wise and, most importantly, Solomon still builds the Temple.

2.2 Solomon in the Book of Chronicles

Background to Chronicles

Before we can discuss how Chronicles utilizes the Solomon narrative in Kings and alters it, we must first establish that Kings, in fact, predates Chronicles. The fact that Chronicles appears in the Ketuvim, or Writings, section of Tanakh creates the impression that it must come later. Indeed, canonization in this third section often does indicate later provenance, since Ketuvim was the final section of Tanakh to be canonized. However, the mere appearance in

Ketuvim guarantees no such thing, as older material that did not fit thematically into Nevi'im, or Prophets, may have been placed in Ketuvim despite its antiquity. Furthermore, a text may contain very ancient material yet not reach its final form until a much later date, thus preventing its inclusion in the earlier collections that make up Tanakh.

Although it is not a unanimous conclusion, most scholars think that Chronicles was produced after Kings during the post-exilic period, probably in the fourth century BCE.¹⁶⁷ Chronicles ends with Cyrus' proclamation allowing the exiled community to return to Judah and authorizing the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus, in fact, issued this decree in 538 BCE.¹⁶⁸ Thus, Chronicles' account of history extends a number of decades longer than the endpoint reported in Kings, suggesting a later date of completion. H. G. M. Williamson finds references in Chronicles to language in the narrative of Joshua's succession of Moses, which implies the Chronicler wrote at a time when the Pentateuch had reached its final form.¹⁶⁹ This would date Chronicles to no earlier than the fifth century BCE.¹⁷⁰ This dating establishes a later composition for Chronicles than for Kings, which was most likely completed in the sixth century.¹⁷¹ William Schniedewind, however, sees an earlier composition of Chronicles in the late sixth century BCE, since the Chronicler seems concerned with bolstering hopes of a Davidic

¹⁶⁷ Miller, "Separating the Solomon of History," 3; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 15.

¹⁶⁸ Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible*, 360.

¹⁶⁹ H. G. M. Williamson, "The Accession of Solomon in the Book of Chronicles," *Vetus Testamentum*, 26, no. 3 (Jul. 1976): 361.

¹⁷⁰ Collins, *Short Introduction*, 2; Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible*, 10.

¹⁷¹ Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 46.

restoration, hopes which were abandoned by the late Persian period.¹⁷² This dating, however, still allows for Kings' earlier composition.

This earlier dating is important, because Chronicles is generally viewed as a reworking of the traditions from Genesis to Kings primarily focusing on the material in Samuel and Kings.¹⁷³ The Book of Chronicles is often seen as an alternative account of the history set out in Samuel and Kings.¹⁷⁴ Pancratius Beentjes concludes that Chronicles does not act merely as a supplement to Genesis through Kings, nor does it seek to supplant Samuel and Kings, because it copies large portions of those two books. Furthermore, Chronicles does not function as a commentary on previous biblical material, as it incorporates new material and functions as an independent composition. Nor is Chronicles a paraphrastic reworking of earlier biblical material. Thus, its genre is difficult to define. However, Chronicles' original material and the small changes made to incorporated biblical material reveal the Chronicler's point of view and purpose.¹⁷⁵ The Chronicler produced his work by amending, omitting, and recasting material from Samuel and Kings, resulting in a different narrative. Schniedewind, contra to Beentjes, however, sees Chronicles' comprehensiveness, along with its failure to cite Samuel or Kings, as

¹⁷² William M. Schniedewind, "The Chronicler as an Interpreter of Scripture," in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture*, eds. M. Patrick Graham and Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 158-159.

¹⁷³ Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible*, 70.

¹⁷⁴ Brettler, "The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11," 95-96; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 645; Collins, *Short Introduction*, 229; Isaac B. Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh: The Search for Solomon," *Hebrew Studies*, 51 (2010): 109, 112; Schniedewind, "The Chronicler as an Interpreter of Scripture," 163.

¹⁷⁵ Pancratius C. Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation in the Book of Chronicles* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3-4, 6-7.

indication of the Chronicler's intention to supplant those works, which the Chronicler may not have seen as canonical at the time.¹⁷⁶

Whether the Chronicler's purpose was to adapt or to supplant, his agenda varies from that of the editors of Samuel and Kings. This stands to reason. Samuel and Kings most likely represent the work of multiple authors and editors composing and redacting over a long period of time, with material emerging as early as the time of Josiah, or Hezekiah, or even as early as Solomon's reign. We saw how Kings preserves a multiplicity of attitudes toward the monarchy, toward the Davidic dynasty, and toward Solomon himself. Chronicles, on the other hand, seems to be the product of a single author produced within a short period of time with a particular social and religious agenda. Hence, scholarship can refer to "the Chronicler" with a confidence it would never presume to attribute to a single writer or even editor of Kings.

In his work, the Chronicler seeks to cast the postexilic community in Jerusalem within the greater context of Israelite history. Thus, the Chronicler emphasizes the Deuteronomic themes of security in the land being contingent on obedience to God's commandments, while disobedience is punished by destruction and exile. The Chronicler offers theological explanations for historical events. In this sense, Chronicles is less a work of prophecy and more a work of commentary. The Chronicler's primary concern is to validate the truth of the prophets in order to avert another national disaster.¹⁷⁷ In other words, the Chronicler utilizes Deuteronomistic theology less to explain the exile, the destruction of the Temple, and the fall of the Davidic dynasty, and more as a practical moral exhortation to the restoration community in

¹⁷⁶ Schniedewind, "The Chronicler as an Interpreter of Scripture," 163. Schniedewind's position is consistent with his earlier composition date for Chronicles, making the canonical status of Samuel and Kings at the time Chronicles was written less certain.

¹⁷⁷ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 644, 647, 652-653.

Judah. The Chronicler is less concerned with the past and more concerned with the present and future. The Chronicler utilizes Israel's past, as he portrays it, to urge commitment to Torah law and to avoid the mistakes that led to exile.

Solomonic Apologetics in Chronicles

To further his theological agenda, the Chronicler makes significant alterations to the Solomon narrative from its original in Kings. Chronicles offers an idealized image of Solomon's reign, focusing primarily on his building of the Temple. Its retelling of the Solomon narrative omits any material about his succession to the throne.¹⁷⁸ It also omits any material that might mar his primary accomplishment of building the Temple.¹⁷⁹ Thus, in addition to ignoring Solomon's controversial succession, Chronicles omits the ugliness of his taking revenge on his enemies. It makes no mention of Solomon's imposing forced labor or of his skirmishes with Damascus and Edom. And most significantly, it omits any reference to his worship of foreign gods at the end of his life. Instead, Chronicles portrays Solomon as a spiritual figure. He remains completely faithful to God. For the Chronicler, Solomon must be pious in order to be worthy of building the Temple.¹⁸⁰

The Chronicler's primary method of remodeling Solomon's character as the pious Temple builder is through omission. Chronicles simply skips the parts of the Solomon narrative that cast Solomon in a less flattering light. Because ignoring all of the negative elements of the Solomon narrative would leave gaps in the historical record, the Chronicler often fills those gaps

¹⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 165-166; Collins, *Short Introduction*, 231; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 16, 225; Viviano, "Glory Lost," 346.

¹⁷⁹ Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 511; Sasson, *שִׁיר הַמַּלְאָכִים*, 13.

¹⁸⁰ Miller, "Separating the Solomon of History," 3; Talshir, "The Reign of Solomon in the Making," 235; Viviano, "Glory Lost," 346.

with alternate facts. For example, we have discussed how Chronicles omits all controversy surrounding Solomon's succession. However, the Chronicler must still address Solomon's ascension to the throne to maintain its claim to be a Chronicle. Therefore, in Chronicles, there is no conspiracy to make Solomon king in the wake of Adonijah's claim to succession. In contrast to Kings, Solomon is selected by God (1 Chr. 1:1). He is not only accepted by all of Israel, but also by David's other sons (1 Chr. 29:23-24).¹⁸¹ Thus, the Chronicler removes all controversy to Solomon's succession while affirmatively substituting elements whose absence in Kings called Solomon's legitimacy into greater question.

While Chronicles does mention the daughter of Pharaoh once and discusses Solomon's great wealth, it omits any discussion of Solomon's multitude of foreign wives.¹⁸² The only mention of the daughter of Pharaoh is to record her removal from the palace out of concern for the sanctity of the Ark and the Temple precincts (2 Chr. 8:11).¹⁸³ It is somewhat puzzling that the Chronicler preserves her at all in his narrative. Her only appearance in the Solomon narrative of Chronicles comes within the context of Solomon's piously removing her from the palace, casting Solomon as primarily concerned for the sanctity of the Temple. Yet, it also tacitly concedes that Solomon married such an impure woman in the first place. Given the Chronicler's concern about the purity of the restoration community, it is odd that he would concede Solomon's marriage to this foreign woman. As is sometimes posited for other puzzling editorial decisions by the Chronicler, it may be that Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh was too well known to ignore completely, and the best the Chronicler could do was to portray

¹⁸¹ Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 508.

¹⁸² Collins, *Short Introduction*, 231-232; Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 137.

¹⁸³ Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 513; Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 177.

Solomon as acknowledging her unsuitability. Or perhaps the Chronicler was not quite as concerned with marriage to foreign women as were Ezra and Nehemiah, resulting in his willingness to portray Solomon's marriage to a foreign woman while conceding it less than ideal.

Not only does Chronicles eliminate Solomon's oversized harem of a thousand women, but Chronicles names only two of Solomon's wives and names only one of his children. This renders Solomon sterile and unproductive but blameless.¹⁸⁴ Given the Chronicler's pro-Solomonic perspective, his inclusion of the material from Kings describing Solomon's tremendous wealth and massive accumulation of horses indicates that the Chronicler views this material as positive, reflecting the glory and success of Solomon's reign. The Chronicler fails to perceive the anti-Solomonic tone of that material.¹⁸⁵ One wonders if the Chronicler missed the Deuteronomic references made by that material or whether the Chronicler deliberately dismissed the critique. Since the Chronicler celebrates Solomon's Temple wholeheartedly in all of its glory and splendor, the lavishness of the Temple would not bother him as it seems to bother Kings. As such, the Chronicle is pleased to report on the extravagant features of Solomon's Temple that better serve to celebrate God's glory. To the extent that Solomon enjoys fabulous wealth, his use of that affluence to build the Temple completely justifies it.

In 1 Kings 3:4, Solomon goes to worship at the high place in Gibeon. As we have discussed, although Solomon has not yet built the Temple, the continued existence of shrines and Solomon's worship outside of Jerusalem are potentially suspect. The Chronicler resolves the potential problem of Solomon's worshipping at Gibeon by specifically locating the Tent of

¹⁸⁴ Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 138.

¹⁸⁵ Brettler, "The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11," 95-96. Brettler notes that the Chronicler makes the same mistake as many contemporary scholars who, failing to discern the anti-Solomonic intent of 1 Kings 9:26-10:29, restrict the downfall of Solomon to chapter 11.

Meeting and the Altar there (2 Chr. 1:3, 1:5). The same verses further mitigate any wrongdoing by having the entire congregation of Israel accompany Solomon to the shrine at Gibeon.¹⁸⁶ In addition, Solomon publicly invokes the name of God there. Having dispelled any notion of wrongdoing at Gibeon, the Chronicler omits any mention of the revelation coming in the form of a dream, thus elevating the experience with more direct contact with the divine.¹⁸⁷ In addition, the Chronicler advances the building of the Temple to much earlier in Solomon's reign.¹⁸⁸ This move eliminates any suspicion that Solomon delayed the building of the Temple.

To disabuse readers of the notion that Solomon imposed forced labor on Israel, Chronicles makes clear that Solomon conscripts foreigners for his labor pool (2 Chr. 2:16-17).¹⁸⁹ At any rate, Chronicles views the forced labor uncritically since it serves to build the Temple. Again, Chronicles is interested in Solomon's wealth only to the extent that it is used to contribute to the splendor of the Temple.¹⁹⁰ Thus, the Chronicler's single-minded focus on the centrality of the Temple prompts him to recast potentially questionable Solomonic material in a much more pious and flattering light.

In contrast to Kings, Chronicles ends Solomon's reign in peace and prosperity.¹⁹¹ Because the Solomon of Chronicles does not commit apostasy, the Chronicler is forced to look elsewhere to explain the dissolution of the united monarchy. To a certain extent, the secession

¹⁸⁶ Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation*, 153-154; Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 513; Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 175; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 73-74.

¹⁸⁷ Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation*, 153-154.

¹⁸⁸ Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 509.

¹⁸⁹ Collins, *Short Introduction*, 231.

¹⁹⁰ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 166, 176.

¹⁹¹ Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 506.

comes as a surprise, since it has no obvious precursor. The Chronicler's theological attitude toward the split of the two kingdoms and the secession of the north is not entirely clear. Ehud Ben Zvi concludes that Chronicles views the split of the kingdom as an inexplicable part of God's divine plan.¹⁹² On the other hand, Knoppers sees Chronicles depicting the secession from the idealized kingdom of David and Solomon as the defiance of God's will.¹⁹³ Given the Chronicler's interest in maintaining the restoration community's unity, its devotion to the new Temple in Jerusalem, and its emphasis on adherence to Torah law in order to avoid another exile, the latter seems more likely. Jeroboam's great sin is to establish worship outside of Jerusalem. His story functions as a cautionary tale for the restoration community.

Thus, the Chronicler places the bulk of the blame for the dissolution of the united monarchy on Jeroboam and the rebellious north.¹⁹⁴ While some blame can be placed on Rehoboam for his abandonment of God (2 Chr. 12:1), Knoppers reads Rehoboam more as a victim than a villain. Chronicles depicts the secession as arbitrary and without just cause. Rehoboam and the southern kingdom remain loyal to God, while Jeroboam and the north commit apostasy. God upholds his promise to David by preserving Rehoboam's rule and the southern kingdom, while Jeroboam turns his back on the covenant.¹⁹⁵ After the secession of the north, Chronicles takes little notice of the kingdom of Israel, focusing solely on the southern kingdom

¹⁹² Ehud Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 118, 123-124.

¹⁹³ Knoppers, "Rehoboam in Chronicles," 430.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 435, 439; Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 512; Collins, *Short Introduction*, 232; Viviano, "Glory Lost," 346.

¹⁹⁵ Knoppers, "Rehoboam in Chronicles," 424-425, 434-435, 440.

of Judah.¹⁹⁶ The north is essentially written out of Israel's history. The Chronicler's message to his community about the importance of unity, fidelity to Torah, and the centrality of Jerusalem is fairly clear.

The Chronicler does not merely omit the sordid details of Solomon's failings and fill in the gaps. Chronicles also alters preexisting material to modify its message. For example, the Chronicler's rendering of God's promise to David merely forbids *David* from building the Temple. In Kings, God declines David's offer of building him a Temple, explaining that He has no need of a permanent house (2 Sam. 7:5-7). In contrast, in Chronicles, God has no objection to a Temple in and of itself, only David cannot be the one to build it. As a result, God's promise to make a house out of David is omitted, and the unconditional promise to David of an everlasting monarchy is vitiated.¹⁹⁷ This allows Chronicles to refocus the theology of this narrative to a more Deuteronomist message that the community's continuation in the land is contingent on obedience to God.

In David's later recollection of this exchange, he explains that he was not allowed to build the Temple because of the blood he had shed in war. However, David reports that God assured him that Solomon, whom God specifically names, would be allowed to build the Temple because God would give him rest from all of his enemies (1 Chr. 22:7-10).¹⁹⁸ This motif of peace is associated with Solomon, not David.¹⁹⁹ Thus, like Kings, Chronicles utilizes wordplay, teasing Solomon's name, שלמה, to emphasize that his reign was marked by peace, שלום (1 Chr.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 440; Collins, *Short Introduction*, 232; Viviano, "Glory Lost," 346.

¹⁹⁷ Schniedewind, "The Chronicler as an Interpreter of Scripture," 165-166.

¹⁹⁸ Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation*, 32, 35-36.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 36-37; Schniedewind, "The Chronicler as an Interpreter of Scripture," 171-172.

22:9), and to describe him as a man of peace serving God with a whole, לֵשׁ, heart (1 Chr. 28:9).²⁰⁰ Unlike Kings, Chronicles does not extend that wordplay into negative or ironic reflections on Solomon. Chronicles does not explain why Solomon merits building the Temple, implying that the choice is a fiat of divine will.²⁰¹ Still, Chronicles, in general, shifts the focus from David and more onto Solomon, the Temple builder.²⁰² In so doing, the Chronicler does not merely omit Solomon's flaws but attempts to create an affirmatively positive outlook toward Solomon.

Chronicles' purpose is not merely to whitewash Solomon for the sake of rehabilitating his character. Chronicles has an entirely separate agenda that has little or nothing to do with the fate of Solomon. Thus, while Chronicles will consistently omit material that is detrimental to Solomon's character, it will at the same time also omit some material that portrays Solomon more positively. For example, Chronicles does not dwell on his special wisdom, his successful administration of his realm, or other details idealizing his reign. Rather, the Chronicler's focus is on Solomon as Temple builder. This is not to say that Solomon is not idealized in Chronicles, but his importance is less universal and more specifically Jewish.²⁰³ To the extent that Chronicles celebrates Solomon's wisdom, it is solely in his role as the Temple builder.²⁰⁴ Chronicles also drastically reduces the material devoted to the women of Kings' Solomon

²⁰⁰ Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 163; Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 111, 124-125.

²⁰¹ Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 164-165.

²⁰² Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation*, 103-104.

²⁰³ Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 16-17, 225.

²⁰⁴ Mark J. Boda, "Legitimizing the Temple: The Chronicler's Temple Building Account," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, eds. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster, Ger.: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 306; Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 175-176.

narrative, and the few women that remain have their roles reduced. Bathsheba plays no part in Solomon's succession.²⁰⁵ Only the Queen of Sheba material is left intact.²⁰⁶ This may be because the legend was simply too popular to omit.²⁰⁷ Or she may serve, like Hiram,²⁰⁸ to confirm Solomon's divine selection, as both confirm Solomon's greatness.²⁰⁹

Since the Chronicler's primary goal is not to resuscitate Solomon's reputation but to deliver a theological message to his community, he has no qualms about altering Solomon's historic role and involvement in the building of the Temple. While Chronicles is consistently apologetic in its treatment of Solomon, it does vitiate some of his glory by assigning shared credit for the building of the Temple to David.²¹⁰ The Chronicler expands David's role from merely wanting to build a Temple to actually making all of the preliminary preparations and raising the necessary funds. In this respect, the Chronicler glorifies David, even at the expense of Solomon.²¹¹ Solomon becomes merely the fulfiller of David's preparations for building the Temple rather than the visionary who brought his own dream into fruition.²¹² Solomon remains the builder of the Temple because the Chronicler cannot deviate too far from the historic

²⁰⁵ Schearing, "A Wealth of Women," 443-444.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 445; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 17-18.

²⁰⁷ Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 17-18.

²⁰⁸ Hiram is Chronicles' equivalent of Hiram.

²⁰⁹ Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 273, 275.

²¹⁰ Boda, "Legitimizing the Temple," 305; Gary N. Knoppers, "Treasures Won and Lost: Royal (Mis)appropriations in Kings and Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture*, eds. M. Patrick Graham and Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 194; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 225.

²¹¹ Boda, "Legitimizing the Temple," 304, 312-313; Hurowitz, "'Solomon Built the Temple and Completed It,'" 285; Knoppers, "Treasures Won and Lost," 195-196.

²¹² Talshir, "The Reign of Solomon in the Making," 243.

record.²¹³ However, David is promoted to chief architect, while Solomon is relegated to master craftsman. At the same time, Chronicles reduces the David narrative so that its primary focus is on the Temple, devoting most of its David material to preparations for the Temple and its worship rituals. Even David's military victories are seen as significant in the sense that they create the conditions of peace under which the Temple must be built.²¹⁴ In addition, the Chronicler attributes much of Solomon's wealth to David's military victories rather than attributing it to God's blessing following the vision at Gibeon. In Chronicles, the tremendous prosperity built by David during his reign does not go to the aggrandizement of the kingship and Solomon's personal luxury. Rather, the Chronicler puts it to a higher use, funding the building of the Temple, which will be a legacy for all of Israel for generations.²¹⁵

This shift of focus from Solomon to David is also reflected in Chronicle's depiction of the Temple's dedication. Small alterations to Solomon's dedicatory prayer for the Temple (2 Chr. 6:12-42) from its source in Kings (1 Kg. 8:22-53) refocus the text toward David and the Temple itself and away from Solomon. Furthermore, the Chronicler has Solomon deliver his prayer from a kneeling position on a platform in the middle of the larger Temple precinct. This distances Solomon from the altar and places him among the people of Israel.²¹⁶ This last detail helps to answer the question of why the Chronicler feels the need to insert David so strongly into the process of Temple building. In Kings, Solomon's role in building the Temple often gives the impression that Solomon's efforts are more for his own glory than God's. While the Chronicler

²¹³ Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 86.

²¹⁴ Boda, "Legitimizing the Temple," 303-304, 313.

²¹⁵ Knoppers, "Treasures Won and Lost," 194, 196-197.

²¹⁶ Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation*, 157-158.

cannot complain about the physical splendor of Solomon's Temple, which he celebrates, he may have felt discomfort with the starring role Solomon affords himself in the building process as well as during the dedication. In Kings, Solomon stands directly before the Altar when he delivers his dedicatory prayer (1 Kg. 8:22, 8:54). In so doing, Solomon seems to encroach on the ritual jurisdiction of the priests. Indeed, the priests receive little mention in Kings' description of the immense number of sacrifices Solomon offers to celebrate the Temple's dedication. The Chronicler resolves the problem of Solomon's oversized role in the Temple's construction and dedication by elevating David to an integral role in the Temple's realization and by reducing Solomon's role to mere execution of David's plan. As such, no one can read the Chronicler's description of the building and dedication of the Temple and conclude that the entire project was just Solomon's cynical gesture to legitimize his power under God's imprimatur.

Not everyone, however, sees David's role in building the Temple as coming at Solomon's expense. Williamson reads Chronicles as welding David and Solomon's reigns together as a single event in Israel's history. David and Solomon become co-equals, complementing each other in the task of building the Temple. While David's role is greatly expanded, he cannot complete the task without Solomon.²¹⁷ Furthermore, David and Solomon are the only two kings to reign over the united Israelite kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital. The unity of the David and Solomon narratives emphasizes the centrality of the Temple and

²¹⁷ Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 511, 514-515; Williamson, "The Accession of Solomon in the Book of Chronicles," 356-358. One might counter that Williamson's reliance on the Moses-Joshua model undermines this argument. Few would argue that Joshua and Moses can be seen as co-equal partners. While Joshua has the privilege of bringing the Israelite people into the land of Canaan, there is never any claim in Deuteronomy or the Book of Joshua that he should be viewed as Moses' equal or that the two periods of leadership should be viewed as one historic period. This notion is also belied by the fact that Moses and Joshua have their narratives recorded in separate books, which appear in separate sections of Tanakh.

centralized worship therein.²¹⁸ This creates a sense of continuity between the reigns of the two kings. For the Chronicler, Israel is meant to be united and meant to be governed by Torah law. While the Temple is not built until Solomon's reign, the Temple's centrality extends back into David's reign to maximize this sense of continuity.

Although it is not the foremost goal of the Chronicler, the result of his alterations to the Solomon narrative is to recast Solomon as an ideal of kingly piety. This idealized vision of Solomon's reign is reinforced by Chronicles' association of Solomon with Hezekiah. For example, Hezekiah's Passover celebration refers to Solomon's reign as a high point of joy in Israelite history (2 Chr. 30:26).²¹⁹ In addition, the Hezekiah narrative in Chronicles utilizes similar legal terms as the Solomon narrative, creating a parallel between the two narratives. In so doing, the Chronicler establishes Solomon as a paradigm for Hezekiah's interpretation of the law.²²⁰ Thus, even though the Chronicler's rehabilitation of Solomon's character may have been the byproduct of the Chronicler's promotion of the Temple, the Chronicler is consistent in this depiction of Solomon throughout the work.

The Chronicler's Effect

We have touched upon many of the reasons that the Chronicler alters his Solomon narrative from that of Kings. It is important to understand that Chronicles does not offer Solomonic apologetics for the sake of apologetics. Chronicles is not moved to change Solomon's depiction because it pities Solomon or because it feels the need to defend him in the

²¹⁸ Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 515.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 513-514.

²²⁰ Kevin L. Spawn, "The Citation and Interpretation of the Law in Chronicles: The Chronicler's Distribution of Exegetical Devices in the Narratives of Solomon and Hezekiah," in *Let Us Go up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H. G. M. Williamson on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. Iain Provan and Mark J. Boda (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 326-328.

face of non-Jewish criticism. Rather, the Chronicler's primary concern is with the success of the restoration community in Judah following the Babylonian exile. The Chronicler's whitewashing of David and Solomon sets them as role models for the Jews of the Restoration period. In this sense, according to Isaac Gottlieb, Chronicles functions as an exegetical reading of Kings, as almost midrashic in its treatment of the Solomon narrative.²²¹ The Chronicler's treatment of these monarchs is essentially homiletic, as Chronicles functions as an extended sermon exhorting covenantal piety and Torah observance centered on the second Temple.

Fishbane, however, views Chronicles less as interpretation of earlier traditions and more as "reinterpretation or reworking of specific sources." Chronicles functions as a rewriting of certain portions of Samuel and Kings. For Fishbane, the Chronicler's resultant history is not mere *aggadah* based on the existing *traditum*, but is presented by the Chronicler "as the *traditum* and not as mere *tradio*." In other words, the ancient Israelite reader of Chronicles would have read it as a history, not an interpretation of history. At the same time, Chronicles does exhibit occasional interpretive tendencies with regard to its source material in Samuel and Kings. For example, the Chronicler addresses the seeming absence of justification for prohibiting David from building the Temple while allowing Solomon to do so in 2 Samuel 7, by attributing the difference to David's participation in warfare (1 Chr. 22:8). This also reveals the Chronicler's struggle to contend with the preexisting tradition of David's sinfulness.²²²

²²¹ Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 109-110, 112, 126. Gottlieb's depiction of Chronicles as an almost midrashic treatment of Solomon is apt to the extent that Chronicles utilizes the images of David and Solomon to deliver a greater homiletic message. It is less apt with respect to Chronicles' interaction with the scriptural text of Kings, as it does not derive its alterations of Solomon's character from sources in Kings, but rather chooses to omit contrary material.

²²² Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 381-382, 395-397.

Furthermore, the very fact of the Chronicler's whitewashing of David and Solomon removes Chronicles from the overwhelming tendencies of most of the earlier books of Tanakh. Kings, like the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomist History, and the Prophets, offers a nuanced portrait of its main protagonists. In the Book of Samuel, David is beloved by God but commits grievous sins. In Kings, Solomon has nearly messianic potential but falls prey to idolatry. Even the Torah has Moses and Abraham exhibit their humanity and imperfection from time to time. The perfection that the Chronicler imbues to Solomon stands in sharp contrast to this biblical precedent. In this sense, one can argue that Chronicles departs from scriptural conventions sufficiently to render its treatment of David and Solomon as exegetical rather than scriptural.

Whether the Chronicler sought to interpret the Solomon narrative of Kings or to rework it altogether, his primary concern was with the restoration of the Jewish community after the Babylonian exile. Thus, in either case, the Solomon narrative serves to promote fidelity to Torah law. By depicting Solomon's Temple as the embodiment of Mosaic Law, the Chronicler advances an image of Solomon's Golden Age as a paradigm for the Chronicler's postexilic community, with an emphasis on centralization of worship in the Temple in Jerusalem as well as on fulfillment of the law.²²³ By offering a cleansed version of the reigns of David and Solomon, Chronicles also bolsters the claims of authority of Davidic descendants as well as the authority of the restored Temple in the postexilic community.²²⁴ The Chronicler's Solomon is highly idealized because he is the Temple builder. Ultimately, the Chronicler's purpose is not to rescue Solomon's reputation or whitewash his failings. Rather, Chronicles seeks to aggrandize the

²²³ Spawn, "The Citation and Interpretation of the Law in Chronicles," 317, 322-323.

²²⁴ Schniedewind, "The Chronicler as Interpreter of Scripture," 158.

Temple. Chronicles is not about David and Solomon but about the Temple they built.²²⁵ The Chronicler's aggrandizement of Solomon's Temple also links it to the second Temple and grants the latter greater legitimacy.²²⁶ The text of Chronicles portrays David as a Moses figure, receiving the divine architectural plan for the Temple from God (2 Chr. 3:1), while Solomon acts like Bezalel, crafting the Temple according to those instructions. In turn, both David and Solomon parallel Cyrus as the builder of the second Temple (2 Chr. 36:23).²²⁷ In addition, the David-Solomon relationship in Chronicles parallels the Moses-Joshua relationship. Both Moses and David are prevented from seeing the completion of their work and aspirations. Instead, they must pass on that task to a chosen successor.²²⁸ Again, this casts the First Temple within the framework of Mosaic law, which in turn lends credibility to the Second Temple.

Still, while it is not the Chronicler's purpose, the effect of his reconfiguration of Kings is to completely whitewash Solomon. As a result, the Solomon of Chronicles is much more one-dimensional and far less interesting than the Solomon of Kings.²²⁹ Gone is the nuanced narrative of the wise king who falls to temptation and human frailty. Gone is the multivalent narrative that makes us wonder whether Solomon nearly achieved perfection before his fall or whether he was always failed from the start. Despite its vague depiction of Solomon's character, Kings maintains narrative tension. Chronicles eviscerates the text of all its drama as well as of its

²²⁵ Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation*, 103.

²²⁶ Boda, "Legitimizing the Temple," 315; Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," 515; Knoppers, "Treasures Won and Lost," 197.

²²⁷ Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 32; Boda, "Legitimizing the Temple," 312-315.

²²⁸ Boda, "Legitimizing the Temple," 316-317; Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 137; Williamson, "The Accession of Solomon in the Book of Chronicles," 351-355.

²²⁹ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 179.

important questions. As a result of this focus on the Temple and its importance to the restored community in Judah, the Solomon of Chronicles exhibits even less of a discernible character than the Solomon of Kings.²³⁰

The consequence of this bland characterization extends beyond producing a less dramatically compelling literary work. As Weitzman notes, “It is the cleaned-up account of Chronicles, written to minimize the problematic aspects of Solomon’s life, that marks the beginning of his transformation into the ideal king that other rulers should emulate.”²³¹ The Solomon of Chronicles is completely redeemed. Rather than being a model of the failed apostate king, Chronicles’ Solomon becomes the opposite, the model of the pious faithful king. This turnaround offers a counter-model to the Solomon of Kings. The two portraits of Solomon stand as two sides to the same coin, as two alternatives from which to choose. Because they are mutually exclusive, they force those thinking about Solomon to choose between two extremes. Or, at the very least, the two opposing portraits cancel each other out, leaving Solomon a blank slate. Furthermore, the lack of characterization we observed in Kings is exponentially exacerbated by Solomon’s characterization, or lack thereof, in Chronicles. When combined, Kings and Chronicles open Solomon up to any characterization, making him one of the most malleable figures in the whole of Tanakh.

For the purpose of our discussion, it is crucial to consider the importance of Chronicles’ inclusion in Tanakh. Had the Solomon narrative appeared solely in Kings, the interpretive latitude we encounter with him conceivably would have been constrained. While rabbinic interpretations through the ages offer tremendous multiplicity of opinions and often offer wildly

²³⁰ Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 135.

²³¹ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 97.

creative reimagining of biblical narratives, they must always find some grounding in the underlying Scripture. The Solomon of Kings violates the three kingly prohibitions and worships idols. Kings blames the dissolution of the united Davidic kingdom on Solomon. In theory, Chronicles' alternate portrayal provides a scriptural basis to argue that Solomon did not sin at all. This is not to say that Chronicles provides Solomon with complete exculpation. Exegetic sources must contend with the existence of both biblical texts. They cannot entirely ignore the Solomon of Kings. However, Chronicles creates an exegetical precedent, freeing subsequent exegetes to defend Solomon on the strength of his achievements as builder of the Temple. Thus, the two vying biblical texts offer two different portraits of Solomon that potentially leave future exegetes to wonder which portrait is the more accurate. Finally, it is also important to consider that Chronicles is the first treatment of Solomon to offer a completely apologetic treatment of him. This sets a precedent that allows for repetition. This is not to say that Chronicles begins a trend of Solomonic apologetics. However, it does open the possibility for future treatments of Solomon. The fact that this early apologetic treatment of Solomon is included in Tanakh makes that possibility all the more viable.

Thus, it is somewhat surprising to note that very few subsequent treatments of Solomon expressly rely on Chronicles to the exclusion of the troubling aspects of Solomon's narrative in Kings. While we will encounter many examples of apologetic material regarding Solomon, this approach tends not to proffer the Solomon of Chronicles as an alternative to the Solomon of 1 Kings 11. Rabbinic literature relies on scriptural sources from both Kings and Chronicles in its treatment of Solomon. Furthermore, apologetic material on Solomon can seize upon the more complimentary material within Kings to achieve the same goal without having to resort to a Chronicles-centric vision of the monarch. Thus, while Chronicles may more broadly open the

door to a more apologetic portrayal of Solomon, in practice it does not seem to function as an alternate vision of Solomon to the exclusion of the more problematic image in Kings.

2.3 Solomon in Other Biblical Sources

We have examined Solomon's role in Kings and in Chronicles. We have also looked at material in Deuteronomy and Samuel that reflects on Solomon. In addition, Solomon makes appearances in a number of other locations in the Jewish Bible. In this section, we will examine his role in two of the Psalms as well as his mention in Nehemiah. Solomon is also referenced in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. We will discuss his role in those three works in the next chapter. Outside of Samuel and Kings, all further mentions of Solomon in Tanakh occur within the Ketuvim, and in wildly varying genres of writings.

Psalms

Two Psalms, 72 and 127, are attributed to Solomon. A biblical attribution, however, does not necessarily imply authorship. It may mean that the text is meant to be associated with that person, either as a dedication or to indicate that the text is about that person.²³² Psalm 72 begins with the attribution לְשֹׁלֹמֹה, “of Solomon.” However, the same opening can be read as a dedication, “for Solomon.” Thus, it is unclear whether the psalm purports to have been written by Solomon or written about Solomon. The final verse, 72:20, states, “The prayers of David, son of Jesse have finished,” implying that David is the actual author of Psalm 72, not Solomon. Furthermore, the psalm itself reads like a king's prayer for his son. In this sense, Psalm 72 casts itself as David's prayer for Solomon when he ascends to the throne. Thus, it is more likely that

²³² Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 215; James L. Crenshaw, “The Sage in Proverbs,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John G. Gammie and Leo Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 213.

Solomon is the intended subject of the psalm, not its author.²³³ Gottlieb suggests that the attribution to Solomon could function as a quasi-midrashic method of reconfiguring the psalm as one about Solomon.²³⁴

Psalm 72 can certainly be read in light of Solomon. It reads like a king's prayer to God to ensure the success and righteousness of his son when he becomes king. Several literary markers seem to allude to the Solomon narrative. If the psalm is meant to be understood as written by David, then his son and successor is obviously Solomon. Psalm 72's prayer requests that the son judge his people with righteousness (Ps. 72:2), which echoes Solomon's request for wisdom to judge the people (1 Kg. 3:9; 1 Chr. 1:10). The psalm asks that he have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Ps. 72:8). This echoes the description of Solomon's realm and its expanded boundaries (1 Kg. 5:1; 1 Chr. 9:26). The psalm references tribute pouring in from Tarshish and Sheba (Ps. 72:10). Solomon receives gold, silver, and exotic items from Tarshish (1 Kg. 10:22; 1 Chr. 9:21), and, of course, the Queen of Sheba visits him and lavishes him with extravagant gifts (1 Kg. 10:1-10; 1 Chr. 9:1-9). Verse 7 describes the king as the bringer of שלום, peace, a word often used as a play on Solomon's name, שלמה. The general theme of the king as the convergence of power, wealth, and honor also evokes Solomon.²³⁵

If Psalm 72 is indeed describing Solomon, then the question is what does it have to say about Solomon? The psalm draws a parallel between Solomon and the ideal ruler, casting Solomon in messianic terms. This may reflect a post-exilic view of Solomon as the ideal king, a

²³³ Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 112-113; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 18-19.

²³⁴ Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 114.

²³⁵ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 216.

view reflected in Chronicles.²³⁶ On the other hand, this picture of the ideal king finds its basis in protecting the vulnerable (Ps. 72:4) and uplifting the poor and the needy (Ps. 72:12-13). The king of Psalm 72 will give his riches to the poor and the oppressed (Ps. 72:15). This description of the king as one with a scrupulous social conscience no longer resembles the Solomon of Kings. Even the Solomon of Chronicles, despite his glowing depiction, is never seen to care for the needy. In this sense, Psalm 72 operates as a critique of Solomon, who never evinces any interest in the needy.²³⁷ It is probably this cognitive dissonance, this disconnect with the Solomon of Kings that prompted the Sages to read this psalm as describing David instead, since it describes an ideal king, perhaps an amalgam of the triumphs of both David and Solomon.²³⁸ As such, it remains unclear whether Psalm 72 is laudatory or critical of Solomon. However, since its hopes for Solomon exceed the realities of the Solomon of Kings or Chronicles, and since it reads as David's aspirations for Solomon rather than a description of Solomon, it seems more likely that the psalm is meant to be read as critical of Solomon. Such a reading seems to reference the Solomon of Kings rather than the Solomon of Chronicles. It represents the king he ought to have been in contrast to the failed king he eventually became.

Psalm 127 is also attributed to Solomon. It comes in the midst of the fifteen Songs of Ascent, which the rabbis traditionally attributed to Davidic authorship (y. *Sanhedrin* 10:2). This may indicate that the rabbis also did not take the Solomonic attribution literally.²³⁹ The attribution may be the result of the psalm's discussion of building a house (Ps. 127:1) as well as

²³⁶ Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 19.

²³⁷ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 217.

²³⁸ Sasson, מלך ומהיט, 55-56.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

its use of the word יָדִיד, beloved (127:2), which could be a play on the name יְדִידִיָּה, Jedidiah, that the prophet Nathan gives Solomon at birth on behalf of God (2 Sam. 12:25).²⁴⁰ Or conversely, the attribution to Solomon may function exegetically, transforming the house into the Temple, the city into Jerusalem, and the beloved into Solomon.²⁴¹ However, Psalm 127 reconfigures the house and city so that they are dependent on God. Similarly, the beloved, is dependent on God for his sleep (Ps. 127:2). Hence, Psalm 127, too, may function as a critique of Solomon.²⁴² It seems to state that the mere building of a house, that is the Temple, is pointless without God's sanction and assistance. This seems to imply that Solomon's achievement of building the Temple was not as God-centered as it ought to have been, perhaps suggesting that he built it for his own glory rather than God's.²⁴³

However, both psalms 72 and 127, whether their original intent was critical of Solomon or apologetic, are vague. Neither demands a critical reading of Solomon, and both can be construed as complimentary. Neither resolves the tension between the Solomon of Kings and the Solomon of Chronicles. Furthermore, neither emerges as especially significant in subsequent discussions and evaluations of Solomon. Therefore, even if these psalms take an unequivocally negative or positive view of Solomon, they are so seldom employed in subsequent interpretation of Solomon that their views are of minimal relevance for our purposes.

²⁴⁰ Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 20.

²⁴¹ Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 114-115.

²⁴² Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 221-222.

²⁴³ The latter half of the psalm extols the benefits of having many children while young. How this might fit into either the David or Solomon narrative is a mystery. David suffers tremendous sorrow from his children. They are anything but a source of strength and joy as the psalm suggests. We never see Solomon interact with any of his children. The only child of whom we know anything is Rehoboam, who ingloriously oversees the dissolution of his father and grandfather's united monarchy.

The Book of Nehemiah

Setting aside the three books attributed to him, Solomon makes one additional noteworthy appearance in Tanakh. His name is invoked in Nehemiah in the context of a discussion of Judean marriages to foreign women. Following Cyrus' edict allowing exiles to return to their homelands, groups of Jews left Babylonia to resettle Judah. Because of the policy of population exchanges in the wake of the Babylonian conquests, the returning Jewish population was met with a resident population of mixed nationality. By the time Ezra and Nehemiah reached Judah, they found that large numbers of Judean men had married local women whom they viewed to be foreign. Both Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 13 complain of marriages between Judean men and foreign women, concluding with the exhortation to divorce those non-Judean wives. Nehemiah specifically censures these marriages by invoking Solomon's marriage to foreign wives, which led him to sin (Neh. 13:26). Furthermore, Nehemiah 13:23, mentions Ammonite and Moabite women, directly alluding to Kings' description of Solomon's love of Moabite and Ammonite women (1 Kg. 11:1), as well as Deuteronomy's prohibition against entry of Ammonites and Moabites into the congregation of Israel (Deut. 23:4).²⁴⁴

The verse in Nehemiah deserves special attention: "Did not Solomon, the king of Israel, sin over these? And among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all of Israel. And even he did his foreign wives cause to sin" (Neh. 13:26). Nehemiah uses Solomon as a rhetorical tool to convince the restoration community to eschew intermarriage with outside women. Solomon is clearly depicted in a negative way, since the text exhorts its listeners to not behave like Solomon. However, the verse also praises Solomon for his greatness and his relationship with God. Yet, these qualities did not

²⁴⁴ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 124-125.

protect Solomon from sin. In this sense, Nehemiah 13:26 gives voice to the age-old question of how Solomon, with his tremendous gifts, could ultimately fall to such grievous sin. For the purposes of Nehemiah, the answer is clear. Solomon fails because of the influence of his foreign wives.

Significantly, the verse presumes that the reader is familiar with the Solomon narrative. It does not elaborate on the Solomon narrative or the nature of his sin, assuming the audience already knows these aspects of the story. Furthermore, the narrative to which it refers is the narrative of Kings, not Chronicles. Only the Solomon of Kings has foreign wives who lead him to sin. This is not to say that Nehemiah officially adopts the version of the Solomon narrative as it appears in Kings. Earlier in the text, Nehemiah gives equal credit to both David and Solomon for building the Temple (Neh. 12:45).²⁴⁵ This depiction reflects the Solomon narrative of Chronicles, not that of Kings. It is unclear whether the author of Nehemiah would have been familiar with the Book of Chronicles. Nehemiah is thought to have been completed in the fourth century BCE, around the same time as Chronicles.²⁴⁶ The author of Nehemiah certainly had the opportunity to be familiar with the Book of Kings. He may have had familiarity with Chronicles, but even if he did not, verse 12:45 certainly indicates familiarity with the tradition that suffuses Chronicles that David and Solomon served as partners to build the Temple. Thus, Nehemiah reflects both traditions without rejecting one in favor of the other.

²⁴⁵ Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 122.

²⁴⁶ Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible*, 362.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SOLOMONIC WORKS AND CANONICITY

Solomon appears as a historical figure in Kings, Chronicles, and Nehemiah. But in other biblical works, Solomon ceases to appear as a figure from history and rather functions as a metaphorical or symbolic figure. Solomon appears less as a real person and rather becomes a literary tool.²⁴⁷ We have examined Solomon's literary use in Psalms 72 and 127, although this particular usage is of minimal consequence to further readings of Solomon. The literary Solomon takes on far greater importance and exerts a much stronger impact on the subsequent understanding of Solomon through his appearances in three additional biblical works: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Each of these works begins with an attribution to Solomon, initiating the long-standing tradition that Solomon authored these three works. As we will see, his reputation for writing these books will have a crucial impact on subsequent Jewish as well as Christian evaluations of Solomon. We will first introduce these works before addressing Solomon's role in each.

3.1 The Three Solomonic Works

Proverbs

The title of Proverbs could not be more apt. It is simply a collection of proverbs. It functions essentially as a pedagogical compendium of advice for proper living. Proverbs adopts a fairly orthodox notion of Israelite piety, often advocating fear of God. However, many of its aphorisms advocate practical wisdom, fairly conservative advice to young men on how to attain social and economic success and avoid the pitfalls that can lead to sin and failure. Proverbs lacks

²⁴⁷ Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 107-109.

any overarching connective framework. As such, Proverbs is usually seen as a compilation of multiple sources by multiple authors.²⁴⁸

Because Proverbs comprises material from multiple sources, it is difficult to date. Michael Fox dates the bulk of Proverbs to the eighth through seventh centuries BCE. Chapters 10-29 represent the interests of royalist and economic elites of that period, who were, perhaps, spurred by the fall of the northern kingdom to record and preserve wisdom. Chapters 1-9 form an introduction, which was probably added later, while Chapters 30 and 31 seem to constitute appendices that were probably the final additions to Proverbs. Fox sees the final acrostic poem of Chapter 31, “The Woman of Strength,” as a post-exilic addition, probably composed during the Persian period, or possibly even in the Hellenistic period.²⁴⁹ Acrostic poetry is a later development within biblical literature, thus placing the alphabetical “Woman of Strength” as a later addition.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, the lifestyle and activities of the Woman of Strength reflect a more urban setting consistent with the second Temple period rather than with the agrarian lifestyle of the first Temple period.²⁵¹ In addition, Victor Avigdor Hurowitz notes that Agur’s identification of wisdom with Torah knowledge in chapter 30 probably also reflects a late date of

²⁴⁸ Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 1; Crenshaw, “The Sage in Proverbs,” 205; Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theoretical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4; R. N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 157.

²⁴⁹ Michael V. Fox, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 499-505, 849, 899-901. Yair Zakovitch agrees with a Hellenistic composition date for “The Woman of Strength,” placing it in the second century BCE. See Yair Zakovitch, “A Woman of Valor, *Eshet Ḥayil*’ (Proverbs 31:10-31): A Conservative Response to the Song of Songs,” in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, eds. David J. A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 410. Mark Sneed mostly concurs with Fox’s, dating both chapters 1-9 and chapter 31 to the post-exilic period. See Mark P. Sneed, *The Social World of the Sages: An Introduction to Israelite and Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 181, 302-304.

²⁵⁰ Whybray, *Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, 153.

²⁵¹ Avigdor Hurowitz, *10-31 פרקים 2, כרך 2, עם מבוא ופירוש, משלי: [Proverbs: With an Introduction and Commentary, Volume 2, Chapters 10-31]* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2012), 598.

composition for this material.²⁵² Given Proverbs' inclusion in the Greek Septuagint, it cannot have reached its final form after 200 BCE.²⁵³

Ecclesiastes

Like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes primarily takes the form of a collection of sayings and reflections on life. Ecclesiastes purportedly addresses what the best mode of conduct is for human beings.²⁵⁴ Unlike Proverbs, however, Ecclesiastes exhibits an organizational framework. The substantive bulk of the work forms the words of Qohelet,²⁵⁵ the ostensible narrator who describes his efforts to find the fulfilling approach to human existence. Along the way, he dispenses aphorisms reflecting his thoughts. However, unlike the overall tone of Proverbs, Qohelet often adopts a pessimistic tone, concluding that so much of his efforts and human activity in general are futile. In addition, in contrast to the theology of Proverbs, Qohelet's conclusions often diverge from orthodoxy, sometimes veering toward the blasphemous.

Ecclesiastes also distinguishes itself from Proverbs by its internal contradictions. Qohelet will express a position and then express a completely contrary position verses later. Just to offer a few examples, Qohelet questions the value of material gain (Eccl. 1:3) and then praises it (3:22). He finds nothing better in life than eating and drinking for personal pleasure (2:24) but then advises that it is better to go to a house of mourning than a house of feasting (7:2). In one of his darker moments, Qohelet concludes that one is better off dead than living (4:2), yet a live

²⁵² Ibid., 564.

²⁵³ Al Wolters, *The Song of the Valiant Woman: Studies in the Interpretation of Proverbs 31:10-31* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2001), 40, fn. 45.

²⁵⁴ Roland E. Murphy, "The Sage in Ecclesiastes and Qoheleth the Sage," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 266.

²⁵⁵ The book Ecclesiastes is also known in Hebrew as Qohelet. For clarity's sake, I refer to the book as Ecclesiastes and its primary speaker as Qohelet.

dog is better than a dead lion (9:4). Qohelet praises wisdom (7:19) but only after earlier blaming wisdom for causing vexation (1:18), which in and of itself may not be such a bad thing, since “vexation is better than revelry” (7:3). As a result of its cynical tone, its tendency toward heterodoxy, and its internal contradictions, no book in the Hebrew Bible seems to inspire as varied a panoply of interpretations as Ecclesiastes. As Katherine Dell points out, a determined scholar can make this work stand for any proposition he chooses.²⁵⁶ As such, any proper discussion of Ecclesiastes must account for its malleability.

Ecclesiastes speaks with two disparate voices. The overwhelming majority of the book comes through the voice of Qohelet. However, Qohelet’s words are framed by a very brief introduction and a somewhat longer epilogue written in the distinct voice of a third person narrator, who reflects on Qohelet’s words.

9. And beyond that Qohelet was wise, in addition he taught the people knowledge, and he considered, and investigated, and set forth many proverbs. 10. Qohelet sought to find desirable words and that which is written rightly, words of truth. 11. The words of the wise are like goads, like protruding nails are the makers of collections; they are given from a single shepherd. 12. And more than these, my son, beware, there is no end to the making of many books, and much discussion wearies the flesh. 13. The end of the matter, when all is heard, fear God and keep His commandments, because this is the entirety of man. 14. For God will bring every action to judgment, for every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Increasingly, scholarship has rejected the notion of Ecclesiastes as a compendium of disparate material. Some still see the book’s epilogue as the late addition of a redactor in an effort to

²⁵⁶ Katharine J. Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 5-6, 11-12, 57; Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 44.

justify the book's internal contradictions and heterodoxies.²⁵⁷ However, many scholars are increasingly willing to read the epilogue as part of the unified work.²⁵⁸ All concede that the epilogue speaks in a voice different from that of the body of Ecclesiastes. The main body of the text is written in the first person voice of Qohelet, while the introduction and epilogue are written in the third person, referring to Qohelet by name. The function of the epilogue, however, is the subject of much scholarly debate.²⁵⁹

Many see the epilogist as commending Qohelet and his words (Eccl. 12:9-10).²⁶⁰ Others see the epilogue, especially verse 12:13's exhortation to fear God and obey His commandments, as a rejection of or as a critical response to Qohelet's words.²⁶¹ Some see the epilogist as neither approving of Qohelet's message nor condemning it, but rather as attempting to refocus or reframe Qohelet's message.²⁶² How one reads the epilogue often depends on whether one views Qohelet's words positively or negatively.²⁶³ Furthermore, how one understands Qohelet's message as well as the epilogist's evaluation of that message will often turn on the reader's understanding of the word *הבל*, which is variously translated as vanity, futility, transience, breath,

²⁵⁷ See e.g. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 30. Fishbane argues that the epilogue is manifestly an addendum to Ecclesiastes, part of a narrative frame that was imposed upon the original composition.

²⁵⁸ David J. H. Beldman, "Framed! Structure in Ecclesiastes," in *The Words of the Sages are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 139, 142; Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 14; Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (Sheffield, Eng.: The Almond Press, 1989), 311, 315.

²⁵⁹ Mark J. Boda, "Speaking into the Silence: The Epilogue of Ecclesiastes," in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 257-258.

²⁶⁰ See, e.g. Beldman, "Framed! Structure in Ecclesiastes," 153; Murphy, "The Sage in Ecclesiastes and Qoheleth the Sage," 264.

²⁶¹ See, e.g. Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 53, 55.

²⁶² See, e.g. Boda, "Speaking into the Silence," 270, 276, 278-279; Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 18-20.

²⁶³ Boda, "Speaking into the Silence," 274.

vapor, and absurdity. The word הבל recurs numerous times throughout Qohelet's words, with his statement that "all is הבל" bookmarking his extended musings. While Qohelet's words contain both positive and negative messages without any unifying theme, the recurrence of the malleable term הבל invites readers to construe the collection according to their varying understandings of the word. For example, Daniel Fredericks and Daniel Estes read the words of Qohelet in a positive manner. They see the recurring motif of הבל, rather than conveying futility or vanity, as really reflecting transience. In this sense, Qohelet's message is one of consolation. While the world may be punctuated by injustice and suffering, Qohelet assures the reader that this condition is only temporary.²⁶⁴ In this reading, the epilogue would not be read as a rejection of Qohelet's words, but rather an adoption of his message or perhaps a refocusing of his conclusions into a more positive framework.

Fox also reads the epilogue as commending Qohelet. Fox's understanding of Ecclesiastes turns on his interpretation of הבל as absurdity. Nothing makes sense, and the human condition is plagued by incomprehensibility. Qohelet's reflections on injustice affirm this conclusion. Since human reason is useless in rationalizing human experience, the result is fear, which the epilogue seeks to steer toward fear of God. The epilogist aligns himself with the wisdom tradition by adopting its language, for example by referring to the reader as "my son" (Eccl. 12:12). The epilogue, by using the voice of a third person narrator, seeks to support the body of Qohelet's work, lending it a sense of authority. Furthermore, by framing Qohelet's

²⁶⁴ Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs* (Nottingham, Eng.: Appollos, 2010), 45-48, 51, 53; See also Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 37-38, 54, 56, which depicts this approach as dualistic, distinguishing between the transitory experience of this flawed world and God's ultimate salvation. This approach seeks to imbue Ecclesiastes with a message of hope and is more reflective of Christian theology.

points within a position of religious orthodoxy, the epilogue makes Qohelet's points more acceptable without undermining them.²⁶⁵

More often, however, scholars have read Qohelet's words as pessimistic in tone, skeptical of wisdom, and resigned to cynicism.²⁶⁶ For example, Martin Shields reasons that the epilogist makes use of Qohelet's words to discredit the wisdom movement. Shields is able to account for the internal contradictions of Ecclesiastes by arguing that they are deliberate. They reveal the ineptitude of wisdom teaching. Thus, for Shields, the repeating trope of הבל refers to vanity or futility and functions as an indictment of the wisdom tradition, a tradition that is useless in answering life's big questions. Through the epilogue, the book denigrates wisdom teachings and promotes orthodox Israelite religion.²⁶⁷ Shields also notes that Ecclesiastes adopts the form of royal biography. Ecclesiastes opens with the identification of the speaker as a king and then reports on his accomplishments. However, just as Ecclesiastes' use of the form of wisdom literature serves to undermine the genre, Ecclesiastes' use of royal biography is also subversive. Instead of celebrating his lifetime's achievements, Qohelet calls their value into question.²⁶⁸ Dell, like Shields, sees Ecclesiastes utilizing the conventions of wisdom literature to critique and highlight the limitations of wisdom literature.²⁶⁹ This overall approach is important for our later

²⁶⁵ Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 31-33, 45, 47-48, 167, 311, 315-316, 318-319.

²⁶⁶ Katharine J. Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Consulting Early Interpreters," *Vetus Testamentum*, 44, no. 3 (1994): 303; Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 10.

²⁶⁷ Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 3, 69, 92-94, 106-107, 234-235. Cf. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 111-118, 149. Fox argues that Ecclesiastes is not an attack on the wisdom movement. Rather, Qohelet promotes wisdom. He merely acknowledges its limitations, as frustrating and painful as they may be. The epilogue does not condemn Qohelet but affirms his place and value to the wisdom movement.

²⁶⁸ Martin A. Shields, "Qohelet and Royal Autobiography," in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 131-133.

²⁶⁹ Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom," 304.

discussion of Solomon's role in Ecclesiastes as it allows a reading of the book that is critical of the bulk of its own content. In this reading, Ecclesiastes establishes the words of Qohelet not to celebrate his purported wisdom but to subject his words to scrutiny or even to denigrate his philosophical approach. In this sense, Qohelet is not the "hero" of Ecclesiastes but rather its patsy. This approach will come to play in our analysis of Solomon's role in Ecclesiastes in the next section of this chapter.

As with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes is difficult to date. Because it references no historic events and addresses broad timeless topics, its content offers few if any clues as to the date of its composition.²⁷⁰ Its language suggests a composition date anywhere from the fifth century BCE until 150 BCE. A consensus of authorities sees it as a postexilic composition, featuring both Aramaic words and late Hebrew similar to mishnaic Hebrew.²⁷¹ Most seem to date Ecclesiastes to the third century BCE, but others prefer a somewhat earlier date of composition.²⁷² However, there are some who insist upon a much earlier date. Frederick and Estes date Ecclesiastes to no later than the eighth or seventh century BCE based on its royal perspective as well as its advice on how to conduct oneself in the royal court.²⁷³ Since Shields sees Ecclesiastes as a response to the simplistic wisdom expressed in Proverbs, he contends that Ecclesiastes must have been composed after Proverbs.²⁷⁴ But his understanding of Ecclesiastes as mimicking the form or

²⁷⁰ Tremper Longman III, "Determining the Historical Context of Ecclesiastes," in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 98.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 93, 95, 102; Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 44-45.

²⁷² Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 23; Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 55; Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 22-23; 24, fn. 4; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 23, fn. 51.

²⁷³ Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 31-32.

²⁷⁴ Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 35-37.

royal biography argues for a date when this form would have been familiar to readers, sometime in the first half of the first millennium BCE.²⁷⁵ For our purposes, the aspect of its dating that is most important is that Ecclesiastes postdates the Book of Kings. The consensus of most of the scholarship, which dates Ecclesiastes to the postexilic period, does indeed place Ecclesiastes' composition well after that of Kings.²⁷⁶ Thus, parallels and literary allusions between the two works represent Ecclesiastes' reaction to Kings and not the other way around. This too will be important to our discussion of Solomon's role in Ecclesiastes.

The Song of Songs

While both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes adopt the form of wisdom literature, the Song of Songs is an entirely different type of literary work, bringing us into the realm of poetry. The Song of Songs does not have a clear-cut plot. Many find no plot at all, preferring to read the work as a series of lyrical love poems.²⁷⁷ The Song takes on the form of an extended poem or series of poems in which male and female lovers pine for each other and extol each other's physical beauty. While concrete narrative is difficult to discern, the Song does return to the themes of lovers being separated from each other, longing for each other, seeking each other, and being reunited. These themes recur either in a repeating cycle of separation and reunion or as recurring motifs. In their moments of separation and longing, the lovers extol each other's beauty, comparing the other to a variety of items from both the natural and human world. The

²⁷⁵ Shields, "Qohelet and Royal Autobiography," 135.

²⁷⁶ Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 43, 45-46.

²⁷⁷ David M. Carr, "The Song of Songs as a Microcosm of the Canonization and Decanonization Process," in *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9-10 January 1997*, eds. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 174; J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 36-37; Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 54; Zakovitch, "A Woman of Valor," 403.

Song's overall tone is highly pastoral, evoking locations throughout ancient Israel over the course of the seasons. The emphasis on nature suits its approach to intimacy, as the Song is frank in its glorification of physical sensuality.

Some scholars attempt to read this work as a product of wisdom literature, with Song of Songs acting as an intellectual discourse on the nature of love.²⁷⁸ In this way, they try to bring Song of Songs in line with the other two works attributed to Solomon, which function as wisdom literature. Others, while agreeing that the Song lacks a coherent plot, still find continuity within the work and view it as a comprehensive composition rather than merely a compilation of love poetry.²⁷⁹ For them, the Song describes the cycle of love from desire, to gratification, to renewed desire.²⁸⁰ Certain recurring literary themes and motifs support this view by suggesting a more unified composition. As with Ecclesiastes, exegetical interpretations abound for the Song of Songs. Leroy Waterman noted nearly one hundred years ago that no one interpretive theory seems to account for the Song of Songs.²⁸¹ This remains as true today as ever, although the abundance of attempts has not deterred scholars from continuing to try.²⁸²

No exception to the three Solomonic works, Song of Songs is difficult to date. Its Hebrew falls into Late Biblical Hebrew, while its use of Aramaic suggests a later date of composition. The use of Persian loan words probably brings its composition into the Persian

²⁷⁸ Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 54.

²⁷⁹ Eliyahu Assis, *Flashes of Fire: A Literary Analysis of the Song of Songs* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 9-25, 266; Martin Ravndal Hauge, *Solomon the Lover and the Shape of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 38-40, 61-63.

²⁸⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 44-45.

²⁸¹ Leroy Waterman, "דוד in the Song of Songs," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 35, no. 2 (Jan. 1919): 101.

²⁸² I count myself among them.

period, although it could have been written later. Although it exhibits no use of Greek, Song of Songs could have been written in the Hellenistic period. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp prefers to date the composition of Song of Songs to the Achaemenid period (539-323 BCE) or a little later.²⁸³ Others, however, date the composition of the Song later to the third century BCE.²⁸⁴ This dating clears our Kings threshold handily, allowing us to read any allusions to Solomon in the Songs of Songs as potential reflections on Kings.

Scott Noegel and Gary Rendsburg, on the other hand, entertain the possibility that Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs may all be the product of Israelian Hebrew, a pre-exilic dialect of the northern kingdom. The so-called Aramaisms appearing in Song of Songs may represent shared features of Aramaic and Israelian Hebrew. This theory would give Song of Songs a much earlier composition date, during the period of the northern kingdom, 930-721 BCE, with Noegel and Rendsburg preferring an earlier date of approximately 900 BCE.²⁸⁵ It is also possible that some material may date much earlier, with additions accruing to the text over time, including loanwords from other languages.²⁸⁶ This earlier dating would prove much more problematic for our purposes. However, just as we did with Ecclesiastes, we are going to rely on the scholarly consensus, which dates the Song of Songs to well after the composition of Kings. While I am conveniently relying on a consensus that aids my argument, it is hard to dismiss the Song's use of Persian loanwords that do not appear in other texts of such early provenance.

²⁸³ F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Late Linguistic Features in the Song of Songs" in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 27-73.

²⁸⁴ Zakovitch, "A Woman of Valor," 410.

²⁸⁵ Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg, *Solomon's Vineyard: Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3-8, 174. The authors concede that the appearance of the Persian word פָּרֶס and the Greek word ἀφρίων presents a problem for their early dating, but they surmise that the words could have migrated into northern Israelian Hebrew or have appeared as the result of later emendation (175-181).

²⁸⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 66-67.

Although we will discuss rabbinic perceptions about the holiness of the Song of Songs later in this chapter, one rabbinic source provides some insight into the Song's origins. Rabbi Akiva warns that anyone who sings the Song of Songs in banquet halls, that is as popular entertainment, loses his place in the world to come (*t. Sanhedrin* 12:10). Rabbi Akiva's injunction indicates that this may have been a common practice that required his censure. As such, the Song may have originated as a popular song and continued to be used that way into the first and second centuries CE. This also reveals that there may have been a division between the popular perception of the Song as entertainment and the rabbinic perception of the Song as holy.²⁸⁷ While this may be the case, our analysis of the Song will suggest a more deliberate literary work with a particular theological intent. It seems more likely that the Song began as a serious literary endeavor and was co-opted for popular use based on its sensual content.

3.2 Solomon in Proverbs

As we have discussed, all three of the biblical works addressed in this chapter are attributed to Solomon. Proverbs, however, bears multiple Solomonic ascriptions (Prov. 1:1, 10:1, 25:1). The collections of proverbs in Chapters 1-29 are attributed directly to Solomon, although Proverbs 25:1 allows for the possibility that the Solomonic material was oral until Hezekiah's scribes wrote it down.²⁸⁸ Many scholars see the ascriptions to Solomon not as indications of Solomonic authorship but as marks of association based on Solomon's reputation for wisdom.²⁸⁹ This association is strengthened by Solomon's reputation for composing

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 64, 70.

²⁸⁸ Sasson, *מלך וזוהר*, 52.

²⁸⁹ Brueggemann, "The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom," 118-119; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 551; Crenshaw, "Sage in Proverbs," 213; Dell, *Book of Proverbs*, 3; Meade,

proverbs (1 Kg. 5:12)²⁹⁰ as well as by material in proverbs that reflects on the natural world, wisdom that the book of Kings specifically credits Solomon with mastering (1 Kg. 5:13).²⁹¹ In general, one often encounters a scholarly assumption, whether reasonable or not, that Solomonic attribution lends Proverbs greater status, authority, and credibility.²⁹² Thus, the ascription to Solomon may not necessarily function as a claim of Solomonic authorship, but rather as a theological claim that the material in Proverbs belongs in the Israelite wisdom tradition that is associated with Solomon.²⁹³

However, nothing in Proverbs resembles anything Solomon is recorded as saying in Kings, making his authorship highly unlikely. Furthermore, if one views Solomon's reign as oppressive and exploitive, this reputation hardly squares with the moral outlook posited in Proverbs.²⁹⁴ If anything, Proverbs advocates fear of God as an alternative to pride and arrogance (Prov. 8:13-14) and credits the love of God as the source of a king's authority, power, and wealth (8:15-21). These are lessons Solomon either failed to grasp or learned the hard way only when it was too late.²⁹⁵ Thus, Proverbs relies on Solomon's reputation for wisdom, a reputation preserved in the Book of Kings, to establish its association with the wise king. At the same time,

Pseudonymity and Canon, 51; John W. Miller, *The Origins of the Bible: Rethinking Canon History* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 149; Sneed, *Social World of the Sages*, 194.

²⁹⁰ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 181; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 551-552; Dell, *Book of Proverbs*, 4; Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 115.

²⁹¹ Crenshaw, "Sage in Proverbs," 213.

²⁹² Raymond Apple, "The Two Wise Women of Proverbs Chapter 31," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 39, no. 3 (July-Sept. 2011): 175; Dell, *Book of Proverbs*, 3-4.

²⁹³ Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 53.

²⁹⁴ Crenshaw, "Sage in Proverbs," 213.

²⁹⁵ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 193-194.

it deviates from the Solomon narrative of Kings by attributing to Solomon wisdom and moral insight he sadly lacks in Kings. In so doing, Proverbs removes its wise Solomon from the historical context in Kings to a literary context of its own creation.

The attribution to Solomon may also have served to lend Proverbs an imprimatur of divine inspiration. As portrayed in the revelation at Gibeon in Kings, Solomon's wisdom was unique in the sense that it was a gift from God. Thus, Solomonic wisdom is not just human wisdom, but divinely inspired wisdom. A Solomonic attribution may be designed to lend a work a similar aura of divine inspiration.²⁹⁶ This concept of divine inspiration of biblical works will become one of the central issues in the discussion of canonization of the Solomonic works. However, as we will see, Solomonic attribution does not necessarily further the status of those works attributed to him. As for actual Solomonic attribution, at best, Solomon's state apparatus and bureaucracy may have created an intellectual class who developed wisdom writings, a tradition that may have been continued by Hezekiah as intimated in Prov. 25:1. And even then, the acts of this intellectual class may have been to compile existing wisdom material, whether Egyptian court material or folk wisdom, not to compose original wisdom literature.²⁹⁷

Furthermore, Chapters 30 and 31 are not even attributed to Solomon but rather to unknown figures named Agur and Lemuel respectively. Both seem to be identified as coming from Massa, which many scholars argue is a north Arabian tribe or location.²⁹⁸ These ascriptions to unknown figures may indicate that the ascriptions in Proverbs to Solomon were not taken as

²⁹⁶ Sneed, *Social World of the Sages*, 254-255.

²⁹⁷ Crenshaw, "Sage in Proverbs," 213-214.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207; Dell, *Book of Proverbs*, 82; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 852; Hurowitz, *עם מבוא ופירוש*, 553; Whybray, *Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, 157.

literal claims of authorship even at the time Proverbs was composed.²⁹⁹ Fox however, reads נשׂא, literally “burden,” as referring to prophetic oracle,³⁰⁰ thus rejecting a reading of Massa that necessitates foreign origin. Furthermore, Agur adopts a particularly vocal belief in the God of Israel (Prov. 30:9). In addition, Agur’s words in Proverbs echo passages from Deuteronomy regarding not adding or detracting from the words of God’s Torah (Prov. 30:6 and Deut. 4:2) and not forgetting God (Prov. 30:7-9 and Deut. 6:12). These aspects of Agur’s wisdom call into question his identity as a non-Israelite.³⁰¹ While Agur’s nationality is less of an issue at this point in our argument, his identity as an Israelite will help to understand the rabbinic discussion of his identity in the next chapter.

In chapter 31, Lemuel’s mother warns her son against squandering his strength on women (Prov. 31:3). The theme of a king being ruined by the corrupting influence of women certainly fits with the Solomon narrative.³⁰² However, Lemuel’s mother continues and warns him even more stridently about the perils of drink (Prov. 31:4-7). Nothing in the Solomon narrative suggests that Solomon drank excessively or that wine was the source of any of his failings. Furthermore, the song of the “Woman of Strength,” in Proverbs 31:10-31, cannot be construed as Solomon’s praise of Bathsheba in response to the mother’s rebuke, or even the praise of any of Solomon’s wives, because the description of the idealized woman in the poem is clearly that of common woman managing a household, not a queen or queen mother overseeing a palace. The Woman of Strength’s focus is on her husband and children, while the queen mother’s focus is on

²⁹⁹ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 547-548.

³⁰⁰ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 852, 884. See Zechariah 12:1 for the use of נשׂא as prophetic communication. Again, Sneed agrees with Fox on this reading (*Social World of the Sages* 313).

³⁰¹ Miller, *The Origins of the Bible*, 148-149.

³⁰² Apple, “Two Wise Women,” 175; Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel’s Ironic Icon*, 185-189.

her son, the king. Thus, there does not seem to be any intent with the text of Proverbs 31 to identify Lemuel with Solomon.³⁰³

Thus, there seems to be little in Proverbs connecting it with the Solomon of Kings beyond Solomon's association with wisdom. Even if there is no clear connection between Solomon and Proverbs, the association created by the attributions to him creates a lasting connection between Solomon and reasoned learning rooted in theological faith.³⁰⁴ This connection does not manifest itself on the biblical level. However, we will see that the rabbinic understanding of Solomon's role in Proverbs is vastly different. We will address this role at greater length in the next chapter.

3.3 Solomon in Ecclesiastes

The association of Solomon with Ecclesiastes begins with the attribution of the words of Ecclesiastes to "Qohelet," who is identified as a son of David who reigned over Israel in Jerusalem (Eccl. 1:1, 12).³⁰⁵ Since David had only one son who ruled over Israel in Jerusalem, Qohelet is clearly intended as a pseudonym for Solomon. From a purely historical perspective, the ascription to Solomon, to the extent it is a claim of authorship, is anachronistic given Ecclesiastes' composition well after Solomon's reign.³⁰⁶ As with Proverbs, many scholars see the attribution to Solomon as granting Ecclesiastes authority, helping it to gain entry into the biblical canon. However, most also note that the orthodox conclusion of the epilogue also

³⁰³ Apple, "Two Wise Women," 175, 178-179.

³⁰⁴ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 181-185.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 202; Eric S. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 89; Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 31; Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 42.

³⁰⁶ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 582.

helped to secure the book's acceptance.³⁰⁷ Furthermore, Qohelet cannot be a genuine pseudonym for the historical Solomon. While Qohelet reports that he *used* to be the king of Israel in Jerusalem (Eccl. 1:12), there is no indication in the Solomon narrative of either Kings or Chronicles that he ever ceased being king before his death.³⁰⁸ In fact, God expressly assures Solomon that the loss of his kingdom will not occur until after his death (1 Kg. 11:12). In addition, much of Qohelet's words do not sound as though they are spoken by a king. For example, a king would probably not dispense advice on how to ingratiate oneself before the king (Eccl. 8:2-5, 10:20). This is the advice of a courtier, not a king.³⁰⁹ In truth, much of chapter 2 does read like the experiences of a king. However, the conceit that Qohelet is a king seems to be entirely abandoned thereafter.³¹⁰

Nonetheless, the reader of Ecclesiastes is meant to associate Qohelet with Solomon. And since Ecclesiastes postdates the Solomon narrative in Kings, it is reasonable to conclude that Qohelet may have been modeled on Solomon.³¹¹ The identification of Qohelet as the son of David, king in Jerusalem (Eccl. 1:1), clearly invokes Solomon. His self-proclaimed wisdom that surpasses all predecessors (1:16), his wealth (2:8, 2:10-11), and his ambitious building projects (2:4-6) all invoke the Solomon narrative. Qohelet's inability to find a single worthy woman among a thousand (7:28) seems to recall Solomon's one thousand wives and concubines (1 Kg.

³⁰⁷ Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 11, 33, 35; Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 42; Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 26; Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 58; Ruth Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 41; Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 2, 24-25, 111.

³⁰⁸ Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 51.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 111; Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 49.

³¹⁰ Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 56.

³¹¹ Longman, "Historical Context of Ecclesiastes," 91; Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 46.

11:3).³¹² Qohelet's experiments in modes of living (Eccl. 2) find some parallel in Solomon's excessive lifestyle, especially those associated with eating, drinking and finding joy (1 Kg. 9-10).³¹³ In addition, Qohelet makes reference to his slaves (Eccl. 2:7), while Solomon imposes forced labor (1 Kg. 9:20). Even the name קהלת echoes the verb קהל, to gather, which is used several times in chapter 8 of 1 Kings with reference to Solomon's gathering of the people for the dedication of the Temple (8:1, 2, 14, 22, 55, 65).³¹⁴ At the same time, by using the name Qohelet instead of Solomon, the text seeks to dampen the association with Solomon. The reader is meant to think of Solomon but not necessarily identify the unknown Qohelet with Solomon.³¹⁵ It is important to note that Ecclesiastes is a literary work. While it functions as wisdom literature, it makes no claims to recording history, and its ultimate purpose is to make a philosophical or theological statement, depending upon one's interpretation. Thus, the veiled Solomonic inscription is less a claim of authorship and more a goad to the reader to consider Solomon when reading the work.

³¹² The connections between Qohelet and Solomon invoke two of the three broken prohibitions of Deuteronomy 17. There is, however, no direct reference in Ecclesiastes to horses. The closest possible reference is Qohelet's description of his acquisition of אֲשֶׁר וְאֲשֶׁר (Eccl. 2:8). אֲשֶׁר is a hapax legomenon with no obvious translation. Usually it is construed to refer to women or concubines. However, Rashi translates אֲשֶׁר as an ornamental carriage, and Rabbi David Alschuler (Metzudat Tzion/David) reads אֲשֶׁר as a covered carriage or coach and וְאֲשֶׁר as many chariots. Hence we find an allusion, albeit tenuous, to horses. Regardless, Ecclesiastes sees no need to indict Solomon. That has been done more than adequately in Kings with which Ecclesiastes presumes familiarity. Ecclesiastes is less interested in what Solomon did wrong and more interested in why he did it.

³¹³ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 584; Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 156; Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 33-34; Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 42, 47; Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 57; Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 111; 111, fn. 4; 132; Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 129.

³¹⁴ Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 33; Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, 83-84; Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 48.

³¹⁵ Longman, "Historical Context of Ecclesiastes," 92; Shields, "Qohelet as Royal Autobiography," 131.

Many acknowledge that Ecclesiastes generally identifies the limits of wisdom. Wisdom, even at its best, cannot foresee the future nor fully comprehend the human condition.³¹⁶ For Tremper Longman III, the voice of Qohelet is one expressing futility. All human efforts are meaningless. If Qohelet is meant to be identified as Solomon, then it is Solomon who is voicing this conclusion of utter futility. If Solomon, with all of his gifts and resources, could not find meaning in his endeavors, then no one can. The narrator, who speaks on his own in the epilogue, responds to this despair. For the epilogist, Solomon's mistake was to try to find meaning in wisdom, achievement, pleasure, work, and wealth rather than in God.³¹⁷ Hence, the book adopts the tone of an aging king expressing his regrets, which evokes Solomon's downfall in Kings. While Proverbs may be construed as depicting the Solomon of the Golden Age, Ecclesiastes depicts the Solomon of 1 Kings 9-11. In this way, Ecclesiastes operates as a clear critique of Solomon.³¹⁸ This theme of the limitations of wisdom and its inability to rescue humans from sin is a theme that will be picked up by a number of rabbinic treatments of Solomon. Even without rabbinic elaboration, however, this theme makes itself fairly manifest in Qohelet's mantra of futility. He begins and ends his rambling musings with the conclusion הבל הבלים הכל הבל, "futility of futilities, all is futile" (Eccl. 1:2, 12:8). Qohelet is reflecting not on life or the world around him, but on his own intellectual efforts. They add up to nothing. So too, Solomon's wisdom serves no purpose if it cannot preserve him from sin.

³¹⁶ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 584; Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 79, 100, 101, 110; Miller, *The Origins of the Bible*, 152.

³¹⁷ Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 51-55; See also, Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 157.

³¹⁸ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 202-203, 205.

This is true because Solomon epitomizes wisdom but lacks the common sense necessary to embrace God and observe His commandments.³¹⁹ This paradox calls the very value of wisdom into question.³²⁰ Shields notes, “At the least, it is very clear that even wisdom of the sort that Solomon possessed cannot guarantee that a person will remain faithful to the law of God.”³²¹ In fact, not only is wisdom no guarantee of piety, but it can just as easily lead one astray.³²² Not only does wisdom offer no panacea to sin, but the pride in one’s wisdom can undermine human humility and piety. This is another theme the rabbis will address in the context of their evaluation of Solomon. Yet, it is plain to see in the text of Ecclesiastes itself. For all of Qohelet’s efforts, he arrives at no satisfying conclusion and has nothing tangible to show for them. If anything, in his quest for meaning, Qohelet makes himself miserable. His identity is so intertwined with his wisdom, yet it avails him naught. Similarly, Solomon, whose character seems to extend little beyond his reputation for wisdom, ends his career with nothing to show for this vaunted wisdom except a splintered kingdom and an ignoble fall from grace. Ironically, it is Qohelet’s own words that are used to question the value of wisdom. If Qohelet is identified with Solomon, then Solomon’s questioning the values of wisdom comes with the imprimatur of Solomon’s wisdom.³²³

Doug Ingram argues that Ecclesiastes’ general ambiguity, as fueled by its internal contradictions, is deliberate. It purposefully allows the reader to fill the ambiguity with his or

³¹⁹ Miller, *The Origins of the Bible*, 152; Power, “All the King’s Horses,” 120-121.

³²⁰ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, xxiii.

³²¹ Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 9. Shields sees the failure of wisdom highlighted in Ecclesiastes less as a critique of Solomon and more as a critique of the wisdom tradition and its inadequacies (10).

³²² *Ibid.*, 83.

³²³ Shields, “Qohelet and Royal Autobiography,” 129-131.

her own interpretive strategy. The word **הבל** is emblematic of this deliberate ambiguity, as it too defies determinative interpretation while simultaneously suggesting the futility of trying to determine its meaning. The ambiguity of the text reflects the difficulty of discerning meaning in life. Just as there are no clear answers to the challenges posed by life under the sun, there is no clear interpretive response to Ecclesiastes. This intentional lack of clarity explains the historical lack of consensus on the book's meaning.³²⁴ It also mirrors the lack of clarity on Solomon's legacy. There is also a deliberate vagueness in Kings, with contradictory evidence regarding Solomon's character. Just as Ecclesiastes leaves its meaning open to interpretation, so Kings leaves Solomon's character open to interpretation.

David Beldman reflects upon the lack of internal structure within Ecclesiastes. He argues that the lack of linear structure is designed to reflect Qohelet's inner psychological experience. It flows from struggle to insight and back to uncertainty. This understanding of the lack of structure in Ecclesiastes serves to explain the internal contradictions within the text. They represent the psychological dimension of Qohelet's intellectual struggle. Beldman reads Qohelet's internal struggle as one pitting his Israelite faith against Greek epistemological thought, with Qohelet concluding that ultimately all is futile. He also reads the epilogue as applauding Qohelet even though Qohelet and the epilogist draw different conclusions.³²⁵ Beldman's reading is insightful in its reading of the human thought process, with all of its internal contradictions and uncertainties, into Qohelet's words.

I contend that Ecclesiastes functions not merely as a generalized meditation on the futility of human effort, nor does it function as a condemnation of the wisdom tradition or even an

³²⁴ Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, 1, 50, 54-55, 74, 92-105, 263, 265-268, 270-271; See also Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 37, which notes that the terms **הבל** and "under the sun" allow for the book's flexibility of interpretation.

³²⁵ Beldman, "Framed! Structure in Ecclesiastes," 144, 146-148, 153.

admission of the limitations of wisdom itself. Rather, Ecclesiastes deliberately and specifically addresses the problems raised by Solomon. Ecclesiastes is a critical rejoinder to the Solomon narrative of Kings. This particular reading, as we shall see, meets the basic requirements of a satisfying interpretive reading of Ecclesiastes. It assigns significance to the book's attribution to Solomon, it provides a plausible explanation for the function of the epilogue, and it accounts for the internal contradictions and heterodoxies within Qohelet's words. The readings of the scholars we have discussed on Ecclesiastes have paved the way and help facilitate my own interpretive reading.

The attribution to Solomon makes more sense when the book is about Solomon. Claims that Solomon's purported authorship simply promoted the authority or even aided canonicity are problematic on two counts. First, despite Solomon's association with wisdom, the Book of Kings, which is the sole source discussing this wisdom in any detail, concludes that Solomon's wisdom was ultimately useless and no guarantee of piety. The final verdict on Solomon's wisdom is not positive. Second, as we shall see, Solomon's imprimatur on biblical works did not serve to further their authority or canonicity. To the contrary, Solomonic authorship arguably functions as an obstacle to scriptural sanctity that must be overcome. Furthermore, as we have already discussed, attributions do not necessarily function as earnest claims of authorship. They often signal that the work is really about the dedicatory subject. Since we have established that Ecclesiastes could not have been written by Solomon, it seems far more likely that the ascription to him, albeit in pseudonymous form,³²⁶ represents the author's attempt to invoke Solomon in the reader's mind. This association of the text with the Solomon of Kings is strengthened by the literary allusions to Kings we have discussed above.

³²⁶ We shall discuss the possible function of the use of the "Qohelet" pseudonym shortly.

Next, we must address the function of the epilogue and why the epilogist speaks in a separate voice from that of Qohelet. Shields theorizes that the epilogist assesses Qohelet's words and decides that they arrive at no satisfying conclusion in order to criticize the wisdom movement. This reading, while I do not share it, allows us to read the epilogue's function as one of criticism and rejection of the bulk of the book's content. The epilogue rejects the words of Qohelet in favor of more orthodox Israelite piety. Furthermore, many have read Ecclesiastes as an exercise on the limitations of wisdom. We have already discussed the apt application of this lesson to the Solomon narrative. In this case, the epilogue serves to provide the solution to Solomon's problem. Wisdom is of limited use. It cannot guarantee success nor prevent sin. The epilogist provides the only alternative: fear God and obey His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). If Solomon had adhered to this advice instead of arrogantly trusting in his own wisdom, he would not have allowed his heart to be turned.

Finally, we must account for the internal ambiguity, reversals, skepticism, and doubt expressed in the words of Qohelet. Beldman's reading of Qohelet's words is most instructive. He argues that the lack of linear structure is designed to reflect Qohelet's inner psychological experience, his internal intellectual struggle to understand. This psychological reading of Qohelet's words explains the internal contradictions, as human thought often lacks consistency and clarity, especially when grappling with elusive concepts or unanswerable questions. This same approach can be applied to a reading of Ecclesiastes in which Qohelet is actually a literary rendering of King Solomon. Even for Solomon, wisdom is no guarantee of moral clarity. The human intellect is a master of justification. It is capable of harboring self-contradictory thoughts. It is easily confused and prone to questioning even the most cherished of beliefs. The more intelligent the mind, the more capable it is of all these mental gymnastics. The intelligent man

defends against accusations of hypocrisy by drawing fine distinctions between one set of behaviors and another. Even the most intelligent mind can be influenced by emotion, harboring one perspective at one time and a completely contrary perspective at another.³²⁷

This window into the workings of the mind is precisely what Qohelet's words seek to depict. Qohelet adopts the voice of Solomon and mimics his thoughts. From one perspective, the turmoil, the contradictions, the doubts all reflect the struggles of a highly intelligent man coming to grips with the limitations of his own wisdom. No matter how intelligent, how knowledgeable, how wise, he cannot fully understand the ways of God. Man is relegated to the world under the sun. He does not share God's perspective, as it were, above the sun. Thus, the refrain that all is *הבל* must be understood in its plain, intuitive meaning, that reliance on wisdom is futile. From the other perspective, reliance on wisdom and intelligence can act as a trap. One can use the intellect to rationalize abhorrent conduct. From both perspectives, Qohelet gives voice to Solomon's internal cerebral turmoil, demonstrating the limitations of wisdom and illustrating the perils of relying too greatly upon it. In this light, the epilogue speaks directly to the problem posed by Solomon in the book of Kings. Its orthodoxy stands in contrast to Qohelet's words because it is a corrective for the error of relying on human wisdom, which is inherently limited. For the author of Ecclesiastes, man's only reasonable option is to heed God's commandments. Solomon, despite his great wisdom, or perhaps because of his tremendous wisdom, failed to do this and ultimately failed as king.

We must consider why the author of Ecclesiastes would write such a book as a censure of Solomon as depicted in Kings. This message works well within a postexilic context, which is

³²⁷ Contemporary politics are particularly instructive. Political scandals are alternately fake and overblown or inexcusable impeachable conduct depending solely upon the offender's political affiliation and its relationship to the political persuasion of the person rendering judgment.

where most scholars date Ecclesiastes. We saw how the Book of Nehemiah utilized the failed Solomon of Kings as a polemic against marrying foreign women within the restoration community. We thus have clear biblical evidence of the use of Solomon as a negative example to avoid. In this sense, Ecclesiastes can be read as a more extended meditation on Solomon's sins and how to avoid them. Furthermore, the epilogue's conclusion voices one of the primary theological priorities of the leadership of the restoration period, orthodox adherence to Torah law. In addition, after the Jewish return following the Cyrus Decree, the population in Judah was able to rebuild the Temple but was without a king. They were subject to Persian rule and would not restore Jewish sovereignty until the Hasmonean revolt. Lack of a Davidic monarch fostered a sense that the redemption was less than ideal. This sense of disappointment also manifested itself in the perception that the Second Temple was a poor substitute for Solomon's Temple. The old men who remembered the first Temple cry upon completion of the second (Ezra 3:12), suggesting that it does not meet the glory of Solomon's Temple. Ecclesiastes responds to these sentiments by subtly reminding its readers that even the most ideal king can fall short of expectations. The message of chapter 2 strengthens this conclusion by evaluating all of the king's great projects and accomplishments as offering no satisfaction or meaning, a proffered antidote to those suffering from an edifice complex. In this sense, Ecclesiastes' message can even be read as anti-monarchic. The wisest king was also an incredibly sinful king whose personal failings brought disaster on the entire polity. The restoration community is not subject to the fickle behavior of a single monarch. Rather, the community as a whole has collective responsibility for its spiritual health and covenantal piety. The Solomon narrative in Kings functions as a cautionary tale to the postexilic community.

It is in light of this message that we can understand the author's use of the Qohelet pseudonym instead of attributing the book to Solomon by name. The absence of a Davidic monarch and the absence of Solomon's Temple also resulted in nostalgia for all things Davidic and Solomonic. We see this tendency in the book of Chronicles, which whitewashes David's career and eliminates Solomon's misdeeds by omitting any reference to his foreign wives, idolatry, or his responsibility for the split in the united Israelite kingdom. As we discussed in our examination of Chronicles, the apologetic treatment of David and Solomon had far more to do with promoting the centrality of the second Temple than with extolling David and Solomon. However, the net effect was still to recreate Solomon as an idealized monarch. Ecclesiastes acts as a corrective to this tendency. Still, it does so in such a way as not to upset popular sentiment. Thus, it uses a pseudonym, but one associated linguistically with Solomon's Temple.³²⁸ In this way, the pseudonym responds directly to nostalgia for Solomon's Temple, referring the reader back to Kings and reminding the reader that Solomon, the son of David, who built the Temple in Jerusalem, fell well short of ideal. Furthermore, while Ecclesiastes seeks to criticize Solomon's failings to warn the restoration community about substituting personal wisdom in the place of Torah adherence, it does not want to undermine the centrality of the Temple. Thus, Ecclesiastes' criticism of Solomon must be tempered. It cannot diminish Solomon's key achievement of building the Temple. Thus, Ecclesiastes softens its criticism by giving Solomon a pseudonym that specifically associates him with the Temple. In this way, Ecclesiastes, like Nehemiah, is conscious of both the Solomon traditions of Kings as well as Chronicles, acknowledging both while making its theological argument for Torah obedience.

³²⁸ Longman, "Qoheleth as Solomon," 48.

3.4 Solomon in Song of Songs

Once again, the foremost association of Solomon to the Song of Songs is the Solomonic attribution that begins the book. Like Proverbs, Song of Songs is attributed directly to Solomon. Unlike, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Solomon's express role in the book is not limited to the opening ascription. Solomon also makes a number of appearances by name within the body of the text as a literary character. As with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the Solomonic ascription is unlikely to be a marker of actual authorship since the composition of the Song almost certainly dates after Solomon's reign.³²⁹ The Solomonic attribution is made even more puzzling by the fact that Solomon never speaks in the first person as Solomon but is referenced in the third person. Few authors insert themselves as characters in their own works in the third person, at least not by name. Furthermore, facially Solomon is neither the subject of the book, nor does he occupy its center of interest.³³⁰ He does make occasional appearances, but when he does, Solomon is described in less than admirable fashion. Solomon's depiction in the Song allows André LaCocque to conclude that "Solomon of the Canticle is reduced almost to the risible dimensions of Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther." The Solomon of chapter 3 fears the night, needs bodyguards, is admired exclusively by women, is crowned by his mother, and hides himself in a posh palanquin. In short, he is emasculated.³³¹

³²⁹ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 573.

³³⁰ Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 95.

³³¹ André LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on the Song of Songs* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998), 40-41, 62, 101.

If the attribution to Solomon is not a claim of authorship, it may function as an effort to give the Song a sense of timelessness.³³² Unlike Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs has a less obvious connection with Solomon's reputation for wisdom, since it does not purport to be wisdom literature. As a result, some read the Solomonic ascription as an effort to identify the Song of Songs as wisdom literature despite its focus on love.³³³ Casting the Song as wisdom literature requires viewing the composition as more than a mere collection of disparate secular love songs. Rather, the attribution to Solomon imbues the work as a whole with inspirational import.³³⁴ Still, just as with Ecclesiastes, the ascription to Solomon in the Song of Songs probably does not serve as a claim of Solomonic authorship but rather as a dedication or as an indication that the book is about Solomon. And just like Ecclesiastes, the Song of Song abounds with Solomonic themes.³³⁵ The attribution is bolstered by Solomon's reputation for composing songs.³³⁶ The fact that the book is called a song, as well as its claim to be the best of Solomon's songs, references the 1,005 songs that Kings credits Solomon with writing (1 Kg. 5:12). Solomon's outsized harem (1 Kg. 11:3) cements his reputation as a lover, making him a suitable subject for a book that focuses on physical love. In addition, the Song of Songs makes multiple references to a king, sometimes specifically to Solomon.

³³² Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 29.

³³³ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 574; Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 55.

³³⁴ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 574-575.

³³⁵ Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 29; Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Random House, 1995), 10; Katherine J. Dell, "Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 8-11; Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 89.

³³⁶ Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 116-117.

In addition, the Song of Songs features several specific literary allusions to the Solomon narrative. Verse 6:8 makes mention of several queens and concubines, albeit not reaching the hyperbolic numbers described in Kings. The text compares the female lover to a horse from Pharaoh's chariots (Song 1:9), which alludes to the horses that Solomon procured from Egypt for his own chariots (1 Kg. 10:28-29). Much of the action, as reflected in the young woman's recurring refrain to the maidens that surround her, the daughters of Jerusalem, takes place in Jerusalem, Solomon's capital. At the same time, the Song makes references to numerous geographic locations throughout Israelite territory, north and south, suggesting a time frame during the united Davidic or Solomonic monarchy. References to Lebanon (Song 4:8, 4:11, 4:15) hark back to Solomon's negotiations with Hiram for cedar wood from Lebanon to provide the lumber for Solomon's building projects. Solomon's elaborate palanquin (3:9-10) is reminiscent of Solomon's extravagant throne (1 Kg. 10:18-20). The pastoral tranquility depicted in the Song of Songs suggests a time of peace similar to the one that seems to mark Solomon's Golden Age in Kings. The king figure enjoys immense luxury as did Solomon. Finally, Song of Songs makes repeated references to the plants and animals that populate the land, which echoes Solomon's specialized knowledge of flora and fauna (1 Kg. 5:13).

Despite all of these allusions, many scholars tend to downplay the role of Solomon in Song of Songs. Many read Solomon and "the king" as a form of role playing for the shepherd youth. The two lovers are glorified as a royal couple, with the maiden viewing her young lover as her king.³³⁷ The king stands as a model through which the young woman can praise her lover, comparing their leafy bed to Solomon's and his wreath to Solomon's crown. Fox reads the

³³⁷ Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 10; Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 8, 141; Fox, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 98.

reference to “the curtains of Solomon” in verse 1:5 as a misreading of “the curtains of Salmah,” Salmah being an Arab tribe.³³⁸ In a similar minimalist vein, many understand Solomon’s appearances in the Song not as a historical figure, but as an archetype of the king figure.³³⁹ The image of the male lover as Solomon is apt, given Solomon’s reputation as a lover.³⁴⁰ Solomon is thus reduced to a poetic tool to glorify the lovers. This approach, however, seems to ignore the insistent literary references to the Solomon narrative, which are completely unnecessary to invoke Solomon for this limited poetic purpose. Furthermore, this approach presumes that Solomon is a glorious king to whom a young lover might want to be compared. However, as we have seen, comparison with Solomon cannot be presumed to be a compliment. When one combines these considerations with the fact that the Song casts Solomon as a spoiled and emasculated monarch, it is hard to see how the maiden would want to associate her lover with such a figure.

Part of the reason Solomon’s precise role in the Song of Songs is so broadly debated is the Song’s lack of a coherent plot. Many scholars deny the existence of any overarching narrative to Song of Songs. Instead, they read the Song as a sequence of lyrical love poems. In such a reading, Solomon’s role in the poetry is merely to link the love poetry to the wisdom tradition. This approach seeks to dovetail the material in the Song of Songs with the material in Proverbs regarding sexual morality and Proverbs’ personification of wisdom as the virtuous woman.³⁴¹ Since this approach to the Song denies the existence of a plot, it encounters far more

³³⁸ Fox, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 102, 124, 127.

³³⁹ Ibid., 122; Gottlieb, “Mashal Le-Melekh,” 117; Jonathan Kaplan, *My Perfect One: Typology and Early Rabbinic Interpretation of Song of Songs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 136; LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, 33.

³⁴⁰ Kaplan, *My Perfect One*, 136.

³⁴¹ Dell, “Connections to Wisdom,” 13, 17, 23.

difficulty in defining Solomon's role in the book. Therefore, his role must be reduced to one of mere association.

Other scholars, however, see Solomon as playing a more direct and deliberate role in the Song of Songs. Many subscribe to a unifying narrative for the Song. However, there is debate whether the Song of Songs depicts one male character or two, one pastoral and one royal.³⁴² For those who read the Song of Songs as featuring only two narrative figures, the maiden and her lover, Solomon must be identified with the male lover.³⁴³ In this reading, the repeated use of *דודי*, "my beloved," is a play on Solomon's other name, *דודיה* (2 Sam 12:25).³⁴⁴ Where Solomon is synonymous with the lover, the power of the maiden's love reduces the mighty king to a powerless supplicant for her affections. Of course, this image of Solomon runs in contrast with the image of Solomon portrayed in Kings. The Solomon of Kings has a thousand wives from which to choose. According to Martin Hauge, the Song of Songs deliberately alters the Solomon legend for its own purposes. It transforms the playboy king into the desperate lover pining for his beloved and even grants him greater wisdom into the nature of love.³⁴⁵ However, some read Solomon's role as more in keeping with that of Kings, identifying the female character as the daughter of Pharaoh or the Queen of Sheba.³⁴⁶ All of these readings still depart dramatically from the Kings narrative. While they acknowledge Solomon's reputation as a lover, they ignore his massive number of wives, instead trying to retrofit him into a man who pines for one particular woman. They ignore the fact that Kings' description of Solomon's love for his foreign

³⁴² Kaplan, *My Perfect One*, 153, fn. 2; Waterman, "'דודי in the Song of Songs," 102.

³⁴³ For example, see Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 6.

³⁴⁴ Noegel and Rendsburg, *Solomon's Vineyard*, 161-162.

³⁴⁵ Hauge, *Solomon the Lover*, 66, 71, 73, 75, 106, 111.

³⁴⁶ Schearing, "A Wealth of Women," 446-447.

wives is notable for its complete lack of romanticism. Furthermore, identifying Solomon with the maiden's lover requires the reader to completely ignore the unflattering manner in which the Song portrays Solomon.

Thus, a more compelling reading may be one in which Solomon appears as a third actor in the loosely knit narrative. Solomon is not the young maiden's vaunted lover, but rather an obstacle between the two young lovers who seeks to keep them apart. In this reading, Solomon repeatedly pursues the young maiden, but she remains loyal to her shepherd beloved.³⁴⁷ This reading offers a more satisfying explanation as to why Solomon is referenced in the third person "and in less than a favorable manner."³⁴⁸ The woman's shepherd love repeatedly outshines Solomon.³⁴⁹ In this way, Solomon functions as a foil for the shepherd love. While the maiden's beloved lives fearlessly in nature, Solomon, who needed his mother to crown him, is carried about in a palanquin surrounded by guards.³⁵⁰ Solomon's attempts to woo the young woman are grossly ineffectual. He offers her trinkets (Song 1:11) and flatters her appearance by grotesquely comparing her features to a series of bizarre objects, such as a horse (1:9), doves (1:15, 4:1), a flock of goats (4:1, 6:5), towers (4:4, 7:5), and a pile of wheat (7:3). Yet he never professes his love for her. It is merely lust, and she is yet another woman to add to his burgeoning harem.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 572; Ilana Pardes, "אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות: שיר השירים," "I Was Like a Wall and My Breasts Were Like Towers': The Canonization of the Song of Songs", *Zmanim: A Historical Quarterly*, 46/47 (1993): 39; Leroy Waterman, "The Rôle of Solomon in the Song of Songs." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 44, no. 1/2, (1925): 177, 183, 187.

³⁴⁸ LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, 40-41.

³⁴⁹ Waterman, "The Rôle of Solomon in the Song of Songs," 177.

³⁵⁰ Fox, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 122-123; Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 118-120. While Fox sees the Solomon figure as a foil for the young male lover, he still does not see him as the historical Solomon, but rather as a stand-in for the stereotypical wealthy monarch with many wives. He is an object of mockery to stand in contrast with the young shepherd.

³⁵¹ Waterman, "The Rôle of Solomon in the Song of Songs," 179-180.

This distinction between Solomon and the maiden's beloved is further supported by the reference to Solomon in Song of Songs 8:11-12. In these verses, the speaker refers to the vineyard of Solomon and implores Solomon to keep his one thousand, while the speaker will keep his own vineyard. Presumably, the speaker is the beloved referring to his maiden lover as his vineyard, while telling Solomon to be satisfied with his own wealth of women. These particular verses are especially challenging for those who want to read Solomon as the male lover, since the male lover seems to be addressing Solomon as a separate person.³⁵² This interpretation is strengthened by the setting of Solomon's vineyard, a place called Ba'al Hamon, which can be translated literally as "the husband of a multitude."³⁵³ The comparison of women to vineyards also implies that the shepherd's beloved is worth more than all of Solomon's thousand combined.³⁵⁴ There is a note of parody here, with Solomon needing to post guards over his vineyard, while the young man has no fear. The reference to Solomon's thousand in these verses suggests criticism of his many wives, the number one thousand precisely matching Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kg. 11:3).³⁵⁵ Solomon becomes a symbol for hyperbole.³⁵⁶ Solomon's wives are reduced to commodities, and he has so

³⁵² Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 577-578. However, because the language of the verse is spoken in the first person without any conjugation revealing the gender of the speaker, one can argue that the speaker could be the maiden. However, this makes less sense in context, as it is unclear what the female would be trying to tell Solomon. The symbolism of *her* vineyard in contrast to Solomon's vineyards breaks down.

³⁵³ Fox, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 175.

³⁵⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 260-261; LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, 132. Exum concedes that Solomon's appearance in 8:11-12 is a negative portrayal, which is problematic for her general contention that Solomon is a stand-in for the male lover and is portrayed positively throughout the rest of the book (261).

³⁵⁵ Fox, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 175; Gottlieb, "Mashal Le-Melekh," 120-121.

³⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 209.

many, he cannot keep them to himself but has to pay the workers two hundred (Song 8:12).³⁵⁷
The male lover's rebuke to Solomon also implies that one cannot buy love.³⁵⁸

This reading of Solomon is clearly critical. Solomon is the villain. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that the literary allusions made in the Song to Solomon are made to the Solomon of the Kings narrative. The Song's Solomon is the Solomon of Kings, the one with a giant harem and surrounded by self-serving opulence. The Solomonic references in the Song even touch upon all three of the kingly prohibitions in Deuteronomy 17. The woman is compared to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots (Song 1:9-10), evoking Solomon's accumulation of Egyptian horses. The song contrasts the maiden with sixty queens, eighty concubines, and innumerable damsels (Song 6:8). In addition, we have just examined the verse about Solomon having his thousand (Song 8:12). Both references are easily read as referring to his harem of a thousand wives and concubines, a clear violation of the prohibition against accumulating wives. Finally, kingly opulence is alluded to throughout in violation of the prohibition against accumulating wealth. The Song incorporates the critical material of Kings but omits the good parts about Solomon's narrative therein. There is no mention of Solomon's celebrated wisdom in the Song. With the possible exceptions of the references to Lebanon, nothing in Songs invokes the Solomon who built the Temple, and even those references can be construed as allusions to Solomon's palace or other building projects, especially since none of the references specifically suggest a direct connection to the Temple. Solomon as the ideal king and Temple

³⁵⁷ Fox, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 175; Cf. Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon*, 209-213. Brueggemann sees the Song's depiction of Solomon's vineyard as a depiction of his harem. This portrayal works as a celebration of unbridled and uncensored love. The vineyard redescribes the Garden of Eden narrative as well as 1 Kings 3:1-3, with human love no longer in competition with love of God. Moving past Solomon's failures, Solomon ceases to be an economic creature and becomes a man of passion.

³⁵⁸ LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, 44.

builder is the Solomon of Chronicles. The Song of Songs is not interested in that Solomon but in the disastrous king who failed to match his potential.

Thus, Noegel and Rendsburg construe Solomon's role in the Song as critical of Solomon. It depicts him as ostentatious, as having a large harem, as lazy, and it credits his mother for his kingship. This last point cannot be under-emphasized. The Song's reference to Solomon's crown is highly probative of the Song's view of Solomon: "Go out and look, daughters of Zion, at Solomon the king, at the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart" (Song 3:11). Mothers do not crown kings. The description here can be read in no other way than as a reference to Bathsheba's political maneuvering that resulted in Solomon's succession to David's throne. In the Song, David does not crown Solomon. Bathsheba does. Noegel and Rendsburg speculate that verses 8:11-12 – Solomon keeps his 1,000, while those who pick the fruit keep 200 – may express criticism of Solomon's heavy taxation policies. This criticism of Solomon is very much in keeping with Noegel and Rendsburg's conclusion that the Song of Songs was written in Israelian Hebrew and represents northern traditions, which would have expressed dissatisfaction with the policies of the southern monarchs.³⁵⁹ While we have rejected this early composition date, the negative reflection on Solomon still remains unavoidable within the text.

Although multiple scholars are willing to read Solomon into the narrative of the Song, no scholarly authority seems willing to construe the Song as being primarily directed at Solomon. To the contrary, Solomon's role seems to be consistently limited to a supporting role, an inconvenient obstacle to the union of the two young lovers, who are the real heroes. Eliyahu Assis relegates Solomon's role to a tertiary one in the Song. However, he acknowledges that by

³⁵⁹ Noegel and Rendsburg, *Solomon's Vineyard*, 166-169.

opening with a dedication to Solomon, the Song of Songs gives the impression that the Song will be about Solomon. Instead of lauding Solomon, the Song ultimately mocks him, deriding him for his wealth and harem, which the work contrasts with the true love of the young woman and man, who are the main characters.³⁶⁰ Thus, Assis reads Solomon's tertiary role in the narrative as criticism of Solomon.

Consistent with my reading of Ecclesiastes, I am willing to take the Solomonic attribution that begins the Song of Songs at its word and read the Song as being primarily about Solomon. As with many of the critical readings discussed above, I see Solomon acting as a distinct character from the male lover. As such, he serves as a villain, who despite his efforts, wealth, and accomplishments, cannot compete with the maiden's shepherd love. However, I differ in previous interpretive readings of the Song in that I read this dynamic as the defining dynamic of the book. The primary conflict of the narrative is Solomon's inability to achieve the level of admiration that the young maiden bears for the shepherd. I base this interpretation on a unique reading of the term *דוד*, beloved. The word *דוד* appears in the Song's 117 verses in various forms 37 times. Throughout the book, the young maiden refers to her lover as the *דוד*, the beloved, or as *דודי*, my beloved. He, in turn, refers to her as *אֵיךָ*, my love.

Oddly, the two young lovers are never named. Only Solomon is referenced by name in the Song. If the story is really about the young couple, why are they anonymous? Perhaps they are not. Few scholars focus on the significance of the maiden's term for her beloved. Waterman, however, uniquely reads the repeated references to the *דודי*, the beloved, as actually referring to a personal name, *דודאי*, "Dodai." He thus identifies the shepherd love as a young man named Dodai. In this way, claims Waterman, the Song of Songs may be read literally without

³⁶⁰ Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 30-31.

recourse to allegory. The identification of the beloved as Dodai also clarifies the distinction between the shepherd and Solomon, casting Solomon as the villain who tries to stand between the two young lovers. With Solomon established as the villain, the Song of Songs must be read as critical of Solomon.³⁶¹

Waterman's innovative reading of the term דודי as a proper name opens the door for my own reading of the Song. I also concur that דוד ought to be rendered as a personal name. However, I will suggest that rather than render the דוד as some heretofore anonymous shepherd who is somehow in competition with the Solomon of the book of Kings, I see a more logical designation of the דוד. The דוד is none other than David. Without vocalization, דוד, beloved, and דוד, David, are visually indistinguishable. Even Waterman, who transforms the דודי, my beloved, into דודי, Dodai, reads דוד as David once within the text. He renders the phrase, מִה-דְּוִדָּךְ מִדּוֹד, “How is your beloved greater than another beloved?” (Song 5:9), into “What is thy Dodai in comparison with David?” He argues that David here refers to the house of David, and more specifically to Solomon, but the verse uses David to create assonance with the name Dodai.³⁶² In contrast, I see no reason not to identify the beloved with David in every instance. This identification of the דוד with David is strengthened by the fact that the beloved is repeatedly identified as a shepherd (Song 1:7-8, 2:16, 6:2-3). David too is repeatedly identified as a shepherd (1 Sam. 16:11, 16:19, 17:15, 17:20, 17:28, 17:34; 2 Sam. 7:8). The maiden's refrain that her beloved feeds among the lilies (Song 2:16, 6:3) renders him the דוד הרועה, the beloved who feeds, or דוד הרועה, David the shepherd. In addition, the Song describes the beloved as

³⁶¹ Waterman, “דודי in the Song of Songs,” 102-104, 106.

³⁶² Ibid., 105. For Waterman, Solomon remains a foil for the male lover Dodai. One wonders if Waterman pondered the possibility of reading the דוד as David but rejected the possibility. Since Waterman's preference is to read the Song in its literal sense without recourse to allegory, one presumes that he would reject a reading of the beloved as David, since it requires a more symbolic reading of the Song of Songs.

“white and red, distinguished among the ten thousand” (Song 5:10). This verse invokes descriptions of David from the Book of Samuel. When Samuel first anoints David, he is described as ruddy, אדמוני (1 Sam. 16:12), which is recalled in the red, אדום, of the beloved. This verse in the Song also invokes David’s military prowess. The word for “distinguished,” דגול, relates to דגל, or banner. Furthermore, “the ten thousand” echoes the popular cheer celebrating David’s marshal victories: “Saul has struck his thousands and David his tens of thousands” (1 Sam. 18:7).

If we identify the beloved as David, we must reevaluate the role that Solomon plays in the narrative. In fact, we must reevaluate the narrative as a whole. If the text positions David and Solomon as rivals for the same young woman, the Song cannot be a literal recounting of history. Unlike the case of Absalom, there is no scriptural evidence that Solomon ever made a claim on any of his father’s wives or concubines. Rather, the identification of the נַיִם as David requires a more symbolic reading of the Song. Instead of a woman of flesh and blood, the young maiden must represent a different entity. Given the rivalry between the two male protagonists, the maiden must represent either God or the Israelite people.³⁶³ The Song of Songs becomes a poetic allegory evaluating the comparative strengths of David and Solomon and finding Solomon sadly lacking.

Solomon has the potential to surpass his father. Unlike David, Solomon is allowed to build the Temple (2 Sam. 7:12-13). Solomon is blessed with peace (1 Kg. 5:5). Frisch notes that Solomon’s other name, Jedidiah, יְדִידְיָהּ (2 Sam. 12:24-25), is a modified form of David, דָּוִד,

³⁶³ For my purposes, it does not matter terribly whether the maiden represents God as opposed to the people of Israel or vice versa. In either case, the purpose of the Song is to evaluate Solomon in light of his father. Whether that evaluation comes from God or the people of Israel is less important.

which is itself nearly identical to the beloved, $\eta\iota\tau$.³⁶⁴ Thus, Solomon begins life as a proto-David, with all of the potential to be as great as David or even greater. But David spends his youth as a shepherd, a humble calling but one shared by all of the great biblical figures that precede him, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Moses. Solomon, in contrast, was never a shepherd. The shepherd is the symbol not only of leadership in the sense of political leadership, but also one of kindness in the sense of caring for the flock. The shepherd leads the sheep to where they need to go and protects the flock from danger. Sheep herding also seems to inculcate a certain level of gentleness and kindness. Sheep are valuable primarily for their wool, which can be removed without killing the sheep. The biblical model of leadership is based in the humane treatment of those whom the leader leads. Solomon's lack of shepherding experience is telling, and the Song emphasizes this distinction between David and Solomon's training.

The Song also seems to contrast the manner in which David and Solomon ascend to the throne. The male beloved informs his maiden love, "my head is filled with dew, my locks with the damp of the night" (Song 5:2). This imagery is reminiscent of anointing, which is achieved by pouring special anointing oil on the head of the subject, thus dampening his hair.³⁶⁵ Samuel anoints David king on God's express order (1 Sam. 16:1) long before David ascends to the throne. Furthermore, God's rejection of each of David's older brothers in succession leaves no doubt that David is God's chosen king (1 Sam. 16:6-12). Just as David is God's chosen leader, his anointing symbolizing divine election, the beloved of the Song has his head anointed with dew, by nature itself. In stark contrast, Solomon of the Song is crowned by his mother (Song 3:11), not God. As we have discussed in our analysis of Solomon in Kings, Solomon ascends to

³⁶⁴ Frisch, "Midrashic Derivations of Solomon's Name," 86.

³⁶⁵ See, for example Psalm 23: "You anointed my head with oil" (23:5).

the throne through palace intrigue orchestrated by Bathsheba and Nathan. Thus, Solomon benefits from his mother's deft working of palace politics rather than from divine choice. While the high priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint Solomon, they do so only at David's behest (1 Kg, 1:32-35). God plays no role in Solomon's anointing.

David becomes the beloved of both Israel and God. For Israel, David is the king who defeats Israel's enemies, captures Jerusalem, and unites the tribes. David himself ultimately becomes the symbol of Israel and later the Jewish people. He becomes synonymous with the messiah, not just as the messiah's ancestor, but also as a symbol of the messiah himself. For God, David is also the physically outmatched hero who can defeat giants solely through his faith and love for God. David becomes the composer of poetry and psalms expressing the utmost love of God. David's love is fully requited, as God promises David an eternal kingship over Israel. David is by no means perfect, but when confronted with his sins, David readily and contritely acknowledges his wrongdoing, recognizing the ultimate sovereignty of God (2 Sam. 12:13). Even in sin, David acts as a model of theological piety.

Solomon, however, falls short. We have already delineated the many references to Solomon in the Song of Songs. We have also discussed the ways in which the text of the Song criticizes Solomon, especially when Solomon is construed as separate from the male beloved. The Song's mocking depiction of Solomon makes much more sense when the male beloved is actually David. This critical contrasting of Solomon with David echoes David's role in the Solomon narrative in Kings. Every time God speaks with Solomon in Kings, He mentions David, stressing David's faithfulness.³⁶⁶ The text does so to create a sense of contrast. As

³⁶⁶ Hays, "Has the Narrator Come," 173.

serious as David's sins are, he never abandons God. Solomon, on the other hand, commits the ultimate betrayal by abandoning God and worshipping foreign gods.

As with Ecclesiastes, we must consider why the author of Song of Songs would write such a book as a censure of Solomon, portraying him as falling short of his Davidic potential. Once again, this message works well within a postexilic context. The Song seems to be addressed to political situation facing the restoration community following the Cyrus Decree. While the population in Judah was able to rebuild the Temple, the Davidic dynasty was not restored, and the Jewish community in Judah was subject to Persian rule. We have discussed how the lack of a Davidic monarch fostered a sense that the redemption from Babylonian exile was less than ideal. Perhaps the Song served to disabuse its audience of its nostalgia for Davidic monarchs. Without diminishing any of David's accomplishments or qualities, the Song reminds the reader that mere descent from David is no guarantee of responsible leadership. For this reason, so much of the Song's criticism of Solomon in contrast with David focuses on the manner in which Solomon takes the throne.

One could also argue that the Song's message about Solomon serves to subvert the prevailing theological values of the restoration period. Many critical readings of the Song of Songs extol it for its subversion of ancient sexual orthodoxies and gender roles. The female voice is the dominant voice in the Song. She pursues her beloved. There is no indication that the two lovers are married, suggesting that the Song depicts intimate love outside the context of marriage. If the Song is to be read subversively, then perhaps its political message is subversive as well. It may function as a rejoinder to Chronicles and its whitewashed portrayal of Solomon as an ideal king. The Song of Songs is a corrective to that portrayal by reminding readers of all the ways Solomon falls short of his potential. The Song is an idealized portrayal of romantic

love, because it is an idealized portrayal of the past. The love portrayed is young love, new love, first love. This is the kind of love that is never forgotten. While David is remembered as Israel's first love, the portrait of Solomon is much more sobering. The Song reminds the restoration community that Solomon was not the Solomon of Chronicles, but the Solomon of Kings, the failed sinner who cheapened his lover and saw her as one more addition to his harem. In this sense, Solomon's polygamy mirrors his polytheism. No one love is enough for Solomon. He cannot love a single wife, nor can he exclusively love a single God. His accumulation of wives mirrors his worship of multiple gods, reducing his love of women and his love of God to a cheap and meaningless commodity.

In either case, we conclude our examinations of the Solomonic works with readings of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs that are critical of Solomon. Both allude to the failed Solomon of Kings, not the idealized Solomon of Chronicles. In terms of the development of exegetical approaches, both Ecclesiastes and the Songs of Songs display responses to earlier biblical problems through literature. They also display a willingness to contend with earlier biblical material and to criticize earlier biblical figures. Psalms and Nehemiah also exhibit a continued need to respond to Solomon's narrative in various ways. Like the two Solomonic psalms, Ecclesiastes and the Song do not address the Solomon narrative directly but refer to it through literary allusion. Thus, at this stage of intra-biblical exegesis, there seems to be little external pressure prompting apologetics. However, the fact that criticism is somewhat veiled by the literary nature of these works suggests that these works are sensitive to popular sentiments regarding the figures they criticize.

In addition, since both Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs are literary works, one in the style of wisdom literature and the other in the form of lyrical poetry, their critical nature is

obscured. Neither reads as a historic work telling the story of Solomon. As such, subsequent readers of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs have availed themselves of multitudinous interpretive strategies to understand these works. Their critical treatment of Solomon has become lost in the process of literary criticism that proceeds apace to this very day. As a result, Solomon's connection to these texts quickly became attenuated. We will now turn to the question of these works' canonization and the role Solomon plays in that process. As we shall see, the Solomonic attributions that begin Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs cease to function as indicators that these works are about Solomon, but become consistently treated as claims of Solomonic authorship.

3.5 The Debate over Canonicity

Problems Posed

Although we will discuss rabbinic attitudes to Solomon in the next chapter, no discussion of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs would be complete without discussing the rabbinic debates over their status and the role Solomon plays in those debates. The canonization of the three Solomonic works, that is the three books with Solomonic ascriptions, seems to be a subject of rabbinic controversy, which emerges in the tannaitic period.³⁶⁷ The rabbinic debates over the status of these works continue into the amoraic period.³⁶⁸ However, what precisely is being debated is unclear. We will examine possible interpretations of those debates, focusing on Solomon's role in them, as well as the consequences of the outcome for the reception of

³⁶⁷ The tannaitic period lasts from approximately the year 0 until roughly 200 CE. It is the period in which the Mishnah and Tosefta were composed.

³⁶⁸ The amoraic period extends from approximately 200 until about 500 CE. It marks the period of the composition of both the Palestinian Talmud and the bulk of the Babylonian Talmud.

Solomon in other texts and traditions. In so doing, we will see that Solomon's role in the acceptance of these works does not necessarily act as an aid to canonization. If anything, Solomon's purported authorship can conceivably pose an obstacle to the acceptance of a work as sacred Scripture. In truth, we will see that Solomonic attribution has less impact on the canonization of his so-called works than canonization has on Solomon.

As previously discussed, the canonization of all three of these works, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, may have been aided by their attribution to Solomon. This seems to be a presumption shared by many scholars.³⁶⁹ The relationship between Solomonic attribution and a work's acceptance, however, is much more nuanced. For example, David Meade distinguishes between texts associated with the prophetic tradition of Israel and those associated with the wisdom tradition of Israel. Since true wisdom finds its ultimate source in the divine, prophecy and wisdom existed as rival forms of revelation. The Book of Kings establishes Solomon's connection to the wisdom tradition. The superscription to Solomon in Proverbs also is an indication of Solomon's association with wisdom. While attributing a work to Solomon places it within the Israelite wisdom tradition, it does not guarantee that work's acceptance as sacred. Canonization is more a function of seeing a particular work within the biblical tradition.³⁷⁰ In this way, the Solomonic attribution aids the acceptance of a work, but only to the extent that one places value on the Israelite wisdom tradition in the face of the rival prophetic tradition. The prophetic tradition faces little controversy with regard to canonization, Tanakh being filled with prophetic works. It is the wisdom tradition that poses the greater challenge.

³⁶⁹ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 89; Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 71; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 21.

³⁷⁰ Meade, *Pseudonimity and Canon*, 16, 46-51, 57-58.

In addition, the specific content of the works attributed to Solomon also poses various theological and cultural challenges. Of the three Solomonic works, Proverbs is easily the least controversial with reference to inclusion in the Jewish biblical canon. Simply put, in any debate about canonicity, Proverbs would have faced little opposition as it contains little material that invites controversy. Proverbs, while it addresses a broad range of practical subjects, generally espouses a religiously orthodox outlook: One should fear God and obey His commandments, because God rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness. While this wisdom may be somewhat facile in the sense that it never acknowledges the theodicy, it does not purport to dispense higher wisdom. Its focus is on the practical, and its message is consonant with covenantal piety, even if it barely addresses ritual Israelite practice. Since Proverbs is not particularly controversial, Solomon neither helps nor hinders its inclusion in the canon or acceptance as a holy book, except to the extent that the work might be seen as the product of his wisdom rather than of divine inspiration.

Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, poses theological problems. It questions accepted pieties such as whether the righteous are rewarded. It voices a pessimism that borders on despair, questioning whether human suffering and injustice of this world make life worth living. The challenges Ecclesiastes poses to its own canonicity have less to do with its association with Solomon, and more to do with its problematic content.³⁷¹ Ecclesiastes seems to present a world without divine Providence or revelation.³⁷² Combine these features with the heterodoxies and internal contradictions we have discussed earlier in this chapter and it becomes easy to see why some might question Ecclesiastes' place in the canon or its status as a holy book. Thus, as the

³⁷¹ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 90-91.

³⁷² Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 23.

standard argument holds, it is the attribution to Solomon combined with the orthodoxy expressed in the book's epilogue that helped to make Ecclesiastes more acceptable by linking Ecclesiastes to Torah wisdom.³⁷³ For example, the epilogist emphasizes that the wisdom of the sages comes from a single Shepherd (Eccl. 12:11), thus maintaining the tradition that Israelite wisdom derives from the divine and constitutes a form of revelation.³⁷⁴ In this way, the epilogue links Ecclesiastes with the Torah. Some might even argue that the epilogue is conscious of the canon and seeks to imbue itself with Torah authority.³⁷⁵

However, there are other features in Ecclesiastes beyond the Solomonic ascription and the piety of the epilogue that may have aided its acceptance. Not everything Qohelet says is heretical. Many of his aphorisms, when taken in isolation, carry obvious wisdom, and some reflect orthodox piety. Finally, Ecclesiastes' canonicity may have benefitted from popular misinterpretation of the text in which the author's quasi-heretical intent was replaced with more acceptable readings. For example, Jewish tradition often treated Ecclesiastes' internal contradictions as an ongoing exercise in evaluation and reevaluation.³⁷⁶ And, of course, allegorical readings of Qohelet's words, efforts to construe them in ways so that they are no longer blasphemous or contradictory, may have helped rescue the book as well.

Shields' theory that Ecclesiastes was written as an indictment of the wisdom movement has implications for canonization. Shields argues that the epilogue's rejection of wisdom in favor of Israelite orthodoxy is probably what originally brought Ecclesiastes acceptance into the

³⁷³ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 586; Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom," 302-303, 311-312; Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 58-62.

³⁷⁴ Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 58-62.

³⁷⁵ Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom," 311-312.

³⁷⁶ Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 10-11, 13, 18-21, 26, 33, 35.

canon. While the rabbis of the Mishnah may not have been cognizant of this polemic against wisdom teaching, the orthodox conclusion of the epilogue resonated with them and confirmed its inclusion in the canon for them.³⁷⁷ Whether or not Shields is correct, his theory acknowledges that the considerations that went into the original canonization of any particular work may not be the same considerations that the rabbis of the tannaitic and amoraic periods debated. Thus, the original canonizers may have included Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs in the canon because they understood them to function as critiques of Solomon. By the time of the rabbis, any such understanding would have been lost, and the debate about the status of these works emerges without any sense of the critical purpose behind these works.

The Song of Songs is also controversial, although slightly less so than Ecclesiastes. Unlike Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs does not pose any theological heterodoxies. Instead, the Song of Songs is made problematic by its frank depictions of sexual eroticism and by the essential absence of God from the text.³⁷⁸ However, because the Song is poetic in form, it more readily invites allegorical reading. Thus, it is not surprising that the Song of Songs has been read metaphorically from at least the first century CE.³⁷⁹ The allegorical reading of the Song does not necessarily stem from a reflexive rejection of its eroticism. The lack of a consistent narrative and the lyrical nature of the poetry invite commentators to impose on it a cohesive structure, often in the form of historicization.³⁸⁰ While allegorical readings of the Song help to resolve its

³⁷⁷ Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 238.

³⁷⁸ Sasson, *שיר השירים*, 58-59.

³⁷⁹ Meade, *Pseudonimity and Canon*, 53.

³⁸⁰ Philip S. Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory: Notes on the Development of an Exegetical Tradition," in *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honour of Martin McNamara*, eds. Kevin J. Cathcart and Michael Maher, (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 15-16.

troublesome aspects, allegory cannot be the basis of its canonization. If that were the case, then any number of theologically problematic books could have found their way into the canon through the magical rehabilitation powers of allegory, which is not the case.³⁸¹ In addition, one does not bother to allegorize texts which are not already considered sacred. Rabbinic midrash comments only on texts already in the canon and thus considered inspired.³⁸² Thus, the Song of Songs' inclusion in Tanakh must have been the result of the deliberate inclusion of diverse texts within the biblical corpus rather than through reinterpretation of those texts.³⁸³

In general, this may be the case. However, in the case of the Song of Songs, there is still an argument to be made that allegorical reading aided the Song of Songs' inclusion in the canon. Construing the Song as an allegory about the love between God and Israel is not without precedent. The use of the marital relationship had been well established in prophetic literature as a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel.³⁸⁴ This readily available allegory made it easy to read the Song of Songs in this context. Furthermore, the Song itself makes frequent use of visual metaphors. The female character cannot literally be a locked garden (Song 4:12), nor are the parts of her body literally the objects to which they are compared. This use of metaphor invites further allegorical reading, which, in turn, made the work more acceptable to those who compiled the biblical canon.³⁸⁵ Just as with Ecclesiastes, it may be that the canonizers

³⁸¹ Pardes, "אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות", 35.

³⁸² Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 71-72; LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, ix-x. LaCocque sees rabbinic midrashic renderings of the Song of Songs as deliberate efforts to subvert the plain meaning of the Song's text, which he reads as a rediscovery of human love within Israelite religion (x-xi, 9).

³⁸³ Pardes, "אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות", 35.

³⁸⁴ See, e.g. Jeremiah 2:2, casting Israel as God's young bride, and Hosea 2:4, recasting Israel as God's unfaithful wife.

³⁸⁵ Pardes, "אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות", 36-37.

of the Song of Songs understood its purpose was to criticize Solomon. By the time, however, of the rabbinic debates on the Song, this original literary purpose was essentially lost, leaving the rabbis to justify its sanctity through allegory.

The Shape of the Canon

We have already begun to discuss a distinction between initial canonization and the rabbinic discussions about the sanctity of certain books within and without the canon. The original process of canonization is shrouded in the mists of history. We know precious little about the process and when it occurred. Even the criteria for canonization are hotly debated. Canonization not only imbues a text with sacredness, authority, value, and prestige, but imparts on that text special commitments and expectations, often assigning a specific function to the canonized text.³⁸⁶ Canonization also allows the ordering and transmission of the tradition to future generations who will not personally experience the revelation expressed in the canonical works. In this sense, the biblical canon reflects the history of the encounter between God and Israel. As such, the biblical corpus should be viewed as a whole, since, as a whole, it exercises authority over the community. Thus, the canon represents the melding of multiple traditions into one defining book.³⁸⁷ This definition of canon has the advantage of accounting for the presence of widely disparate texts. They are viewed as alternative expressions of the revelatory tradition. In this sense, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, to the extent that they constitute critical evaluations of Solomon in the tradition of the Book of Kings, fit very well within the canon. Their inclusion is hardly controversial.

³⁸⁶ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 50; Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 11-12.

³⁸⁷ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 60, 75-79; Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 6.

Sid Leiman tries to distinguish between different levels of scriptural sanctity and canonicity. According to Leiman, inclusion in Hebrew Scripture was limited to works that the rabbis understood to be composed under divine inspiration. Inspired texts became sacred texts. Uninspired works, such as the Mishnah, were not included in Tanakh. Books like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs are more complicated. They are not manifestly products of divine inspiration, yet they were ultimately canonized.³⁸⁸ This may reflect their canonization prior to the rabbinic debates regarding their divine inspiration. A wide range of other books were excluded from the canon. Their exclusion helped Pharisaic Judaism to set itself apart from Jewish sectarianism and Christian groups.³⁸⁹ Thus, apocryphal works that lacked divine inspiration, such as the Book of Maccabees, were excluded. Similarly, books that purported to be divinely inspired but represented sectarian beliefs, such as the Book of Jubilees, were also excluded. The same would hold true of Christian works, such as the Gospels.

The Torah seems to have been closed and canonized by the time of Ezra. The prophetic canon also seems to have closed by about 400 BCE, as evidenced by its omission of Ezra-Nehemiah, but no later than 200 BCE. However, the date of canonization of Ketuvim, the Writings, is the least clear. Ben Sira (approximately 300-200 BCE) references all of the books of Ketuvim except Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther, and Daniel. Philo (early first century CE) seldom makes mention of any books outside of the Torah, never referring to either Ecclesiastes or Song of Songs. Josephus (late first century CE) describes a biblical canon of twenty-two works in three sections containing five, thirteen, and four books respectively, all of which he describes as holy (Josephus, *Against Apion*, I, 8). Leiman concludes that the four books of Josephus'

³⁸⁸ Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, CT: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1976), 14-15.

³⁸⁹ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 66-67.

Ketuvim must have included Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. He also concludes that the Ketuvim section of Tanakh was already closed by the second century BCE, with Daniel, a product of the Maccabean period, as the final addition.³⁹⁰ Citing the same evidence, Moshe Halbertal dates the close of the Jewish biblical canon to the Second Temple period, as early as 150 BCE.³⁹¹ These dates of canonization mean that the Jewish scriptural canon was closed long before the rabbinic debates about the status of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. This suggests that the rabbinic discussion is not one about canonicity but about something else.

Certainly by the amoraic period, the form of Tanakh is well established. The Talmud³⁹² discusses a three-sectioned Bible comprising twenty-four books (*b. Bava Batra* 14b-15a; *b. Taanit* 8a) as do numerous midrashic sources. All of these sources are attributed to rabbis from the amoraic period. This is not to say that the tannaim did not share the same canonical structure. All of these books are cited as authoritative in the Mishnah.³⁹³ Interestingly, the Talmud in *Bava Batra* attributes the three works, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, normally credited to Solomon, instead to the men of Hezekiah (*b. Bava Batra* 15a). However, the Talmud here may be discussing transcription and transmission, not composition. This is consistent with Proverbs 25:1, which attributes authorship of a series of proverbs to Solomon but credits their transcription to Hezekiah and his men. And although this talmudic excerpt

³⁹⁰ Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 26-29, 31-33, 131-132. See also Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 51-52, 63-64, 67, which provides a similar timeline for the compilation and canonization of the various elements of Tanakh.

³⁹¹ Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 16.

³⁹² I use “the Talmud” to refer to the Babylonian Talmud. References to the Palestinian Talmud are specifically identified as such.

³⁹³ Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 51-56.

discusses the shape of the canon, nothing in it suggests it is considering the canonization process. At the same time, this discussion in *Bava Batra*, with its focus on transmission, not composition, may reflect a rabbinic effort to minimize Solomon's association with the three works normally attributed to him in favor of a divine source. Jed Wyrick argues that rabbinic theology disfavored individual authors, preferring to view biblical texts as deriving from divine authorship. This explains Rabbi Akiva's claim that the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies, tantamount in glory to the revelation at Sinai (*m. Yadayim* 3:5; *Song Rab.* 1:1; *Tanh. Tetzaveh* 5).³⁹⁴ Rabbi Akiva's rapturous conclusions essentially remove Solomon from the debate, characterizing the Song of Songs as divine revelation.³⁹⁵

Despite their lack of clear divine inspiration, the rabbis are forced to contend with the fact that the Solomonic works are firmly set within Tanakh. Furthermore, having lost the tradition of the works' anti-Solomon polemics, the rabbis are left to understand the Solomonic attributions of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs more literally. Thus, the rabbinic sources never question Solomon's authorship of the entirety of the books attributed to him.³⁹⁶ Solomon's authorship of these works makes them more problematic in the rabbinic mind, as it allows for the possibility that they were merely the products of Solomon's wisdom rather than compositions of divine inspiration. Their very presence in the canon, however, militates for reading those books as divinely inspired. As a result, the rabbinic literature tends to see them as inspired and varies rather on whether Solomon composed his works through prophecy or through divine

³⁹⁴ Citations to *Midrash Tanhuma* are to the Warsaw manuscript.

³⁹⁵ Jed Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 21-22, 28, 53-55, 78-79, 81-82.

³⁹⁶ Sasson, *שׁוֹת וּמִשְׁבָּח*, 51.

inspiration.³⁹⁷ And the distinction between these two levels of inspiration may have little impact on their authority, since, as Leiman argues, the rabbis made little distinction between the two types of revelation.³⁹⁸ In the end, we have a rabbinic debate not about what books should be canonized but rather an effort on the part of the rabbis to justify the rationale of the canon as they have received it. With this in mind, we turn to the rabbinic discussions over the status of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

Defilement of the Hands

The rabbis of the Mishnah and Tosefta discuss whether specific books defile the hands. This debate appears in a number of texts and extends into the Talmud. *M. Yadayim* 3:5 offers a prime example. It states in part:

A book that was erased and eighty-five letters remain in it, like the portion of “And it was when the Ark would travel,” defiles the hands. A scroll upon which are written eighty-five letters... defiles the hands. All sacred writings defile the hands. The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands. Rabbi Judah says: The Song of Songs defiles the hands, and Ecclesiastes is the subject of debate. Rabbi Yosi says: Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands, and the Song of Songs is the subject of debate.... Rabbi Simon ben Azzai said: I received from the mouths of seventy-two elders on the day they placed Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah over the academy that the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands. Rabbi Akiva said: Heaven forbid that any person from Israel should debate whether the Song of Songs defiles the hands, because the entire world was never as worthy as on the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. For all of the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies. And if they debate, they debate solely regarding Ecclesiastes. Rabbi Johanan, the son of Joshua, the son of Rabbi

³⁹⁷ Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 65, 69. For example, *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:1,6 claims that Solomon wrote his works through divine inspiration, while *b. Sotah* 48a-b lists Solomon as one of the early prophets.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

Akiva's father-in-law, said: According to the words of ben Azzai, so they debated, and so they ruled (*m. Yadayim* 3:5).

The tannaitic discussion about which books defile the hands is commonly understood as a discussion of canonicity, books that defile the hands being considered holy Scriptures. This line of thought dates the closing of the Jewish biblical canon to the council at Yavneh in 90 CE.³⁹⁹ As evidenced in the mishnah cited above, this is the same time that the sages deposed Rabban Gamliel II and replaced him with Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah.⁴⁰⁰ However, this presumption that the debate over defilement of the hands is about canonicity is not universally held. We have already discussed the relative dating of the close of the Jewish canon to the tannaitic debates. As such, most of the scholarship that focuses specifically on this issue rejects the assumption that the debate over defilement of the hands is a debate about canonicity. This is especially true for those who see the close of the Jewish biblical canon dating to the Second Temple period, well before the debates that appear in the tannaitic sources. This conclusion is further bolstered by the fact that none of the biblical books debated in the rabbinic sources were ultimately excluded from the canon.⁴⁰¹

Furthermore, it can be argued that the rabbis would not apply exegetical interpretation to a text that was not already considered part of the canon. Indeed, in examining Rabbi Akiva's statement regarding the Song of Songs in *m. Yadayim* 3:5, we see that it functions less as an

³⁹⁹ Philip S. Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 34. Alexander sees the debate over the canonicity of books like the Song of Songs continuing well into the second century (34-35); Martin Goodman, "Sacred Scripture and 'Defiling the Hands,'" *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 41, no.1 (Apr. 1990): 99; Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 102-103.

⁴⁰⁰ Jeremy W. Scott, "Yavneh: Determining a Fixture Point of the Hebrew Canon" (Master of Arts dissertation, Regent University, 2011), 19, 25-27.

⁴⁰¹ Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 16-17.

argument regarding the Song's canonical status and more as an exegetical treatment of the Song. Rabbi Akiva does not merely state that the Song of Songs was divinely inspired. Rather, he draws a parallel between the Song and the Holy of Holies. Marc Hirshman notes that this move allows Rabbi Akiva to utilize the Song not just to extol love of God but to emphasize the element of love in religion.⁴⁰² The very fact that Rabbi Akiva utilizes the Song of Songs as the basis for his broader argument regarding the role of love indicates an approach to the Song that lends it the necessary authority to substantiate such an argument. Rabbi Akiva's argument about love would not work if he had based it on a non-canonical book. Rabbi Akiva's argument also implies that his is an allegorical reading of the Song, that it speaks of divine love and not simply the secular love between two people. Again, one can argue that the rabbis did not apply allegorical interpretation to non-canonical texts. It is true that Rabbi Akiva postdates the purported date of the Council of Yavneh. However, the inclusion of his statements within the same mishnah discussing the Song's status suggests that the matter being addressed is not canonicity but rather the spiritual status of these books.

Rejecting notions of a debate about canonicity, a number of scholars conclude that the issue of whether a book defiles the hands has to do with whether that book was divinely inspired.⁴⁰³ Accordingly to Leiman, the debate over whether the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands was one regarding whether these works were divinely inspired, not whether they were canonical. Any work that is divinely inspired is automatically canonical. However, some works could be canonical without being divinely inspired. For example, the rabbis considered

⁴⁰² Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 83-84.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 17; Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 89; Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 111; Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," 37; Scott, "Yavneh: Determining a Fixture Point of the Hebrew Canon," 41-44.

Megillat Taanit canonical but uninspired.⁴⁰⁴ It acts as an authoritative text, but it would not defile the hands. Thus, the debate over whether Ecclesiastes defiles the hands is a debate of which kind of canonical work it is, inspired or uninspired. The same rabbinic authorities who argue that Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands still use Ecclesiastes as an authoritative proof-text, thus supporting Leiman's claim that the rabbinic debate is not over canonicity. Furthermore, argues Leiman, most of the books that are subject to these debates are, in fact, found in the biblical canon. The vast majority of human writings, on the other hand, were not subjected to debate. It is precisely because these books were found in the canon that they were subject to debate in the first place. Thus, Leiman rejects the notion that the Jewish biblical canon was canonized at Yavneh. And even if it had been, the debates surrounding the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes continue long afterward.⁴⁰⁵ The fact that the books most hotly debated, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, constitute three of the five megillot, a designation that was created during the Middle Ages, indicates a concern with whether these later books were the products of divine inspiration or purely human works.⁴⁰⁶

If the discussion of defilement of the hands is not about canonicity, then it is not entirely clear what is being debated.⁴⁰⁷ *M. Yadayim* 3:5 never explicitly discusses the Song of Songs or Ecclesiastes' inclusion in or exclusion from Tanakh. Nor do the rabbinic texts ever tie their

⁴⁰⁴ Leiman's argument is made slightly murky by his broader definition of canon. He seems to define canon as including all authoritative texts, not just the books included in Tanakh. Thus, Megillat Taanit, a treatment of fast days and holidays, which is not included in Tanakh but is cited in rabbinic texts as authoritative, is part of Leiman's greater canon, along with the Mishnah and the Talmud. A book like Ecclesiastes, however, is included in Tanakh even though it too may not be divinely inspired.

⁴⁰⁵ Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 111-115, 120-124, 132; See also Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," 37.

⁴⁰⁶ Sasson, *מגילת אשתי*, 58.

⁴⁰⁷ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 89; Goodman, "Sacred Scripture and 'Defiling the Hands,'" 101.

status of defiling the hands to any feature or omission in the texts themselves.⁴⁰⁸ In fact, the origin of the halakhic concept of sacred writings defiling the hands is murky. *M. Yadayim* 3:5 takes for granted that certain books defile the hands without ever explaining why that should be. It certainly is a counter-intuitive concept. One would expect holy books to either convey sanctity or at the very least to not defile the hands, since defilement is associated with death, bodily fluids, vermin, and filth, the type of things that cause revulsion, not adoration. The lack of rabbinic explanation as to why holy books should defile the hands, Leiman argues, indicates that the concept of certain writings defiling the hands predates the mishnaic discussion.⁴⁰⁹

Some scholars have attempted to explain why holy writings might defile the hands. Scrolls of divinely inspired works could not be stored with *terumah*, produce set aside for the priests, for fear of damage to the scrolls. If scrolls were stored with food, the presence of food might attract vermin that would damage the scrolls. *Terumah* is holy and can be consumed only by priests. If the *terumah* contracts impurity, it can no longer be consumed. Thus, the rendering of divinely inspired scrolls as sources of impurity assured their safe storage away from *terumah*.⁴¹⁰ In a similar vein, rabbinic law imputing impurity to divinely inspired works may have sought to protect these works from careless handling.⁴¹¹ This certainly would have the

⁴⁰⁸ John Barton, "The Canonicity of the Song of Songs," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 1-5.

⁴⁰⁹ Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 103, 118.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 115; Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," 38.

⁴¹¹ Michael J. Broyde, "Defilement of the Hands, Canonization of the Bible, and the Special Status of Esther," *Judaism*, 44, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 66; Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 116.

intended effect. If one cannot directly touch a holy scroll without contracting impurity, one needs to be very careful and conscious of how one handles it.⁴¹²

Not everyone agrees with Leiman's assessment that the debate over defilement of the hands was a debate over whether certain works were divinely inspired. While Michael Broyde agrees that the debate about whether texts defile the hands has nothing to do with canonicity, he argues that it also has nothing to do with whether the works under debate are the products of divine inspiration. Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs are full members of the Jewish biblical canon. Rather, argues Broyde, the rabbinic debate centers around the absence of the tetragrammaton, the four letter name of God, in these texts. In this sense, the debate is one of practical halakhic import: What are the restrictions regarding the handling of these texts? If they do not contain the name of God, then they need not be handled with the same degree of care as, say, a Torah scroll. On the other hand, those rabbis who argued that the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes do defile the hands saw in them a general holiness in keeping with the rest of Tanakh, despite the absence of God's name.⁴¹³ Or to put it another way, if a text lacks the name of God, it does not require burial upon retirement, and thus does not bear the same level of sanctity as those texts that do. In order to compensate for the lack of God's name, rabbinic literature reads God back into the text of the Song of Songs by construing any mention of Solomon as referring to God (*Song Rab.* 1:11). Similarly, Ecclesiastes lacks the tetragrammaton. It does however use the "Elohim" name of God. As with the Song of Songs, the rabbinic

⁴¹² In contemporary Judaism, the practice remains that one is not to come into direct physical contact with the parchment of a Torah scroll. For this reason, the Torah scroll is mounted on rollers and read with a pointer. Congregants called to the Torah "kiss" the parchment by touching a prayer shawl or the Torah's girdle to the text and kissing that item instead. When not in use, the Torah scroll is wrapped and covered to ensure safe handling. As one can imagine, these practices probably ensure the scroll's greater longevity while creating an atmosphere of reverence around the Torah scroll as a holy object.

⁴¹³ Broyde, "Defilement of the Hands," 72-73.

literature redeems Ecclesiastes by reading it metaphorically and imposing upon it more orthodox Godliness.⁴¹⁴

Mark Giszczak agrees with Leiman to the extent that defilement of the hands has nothing to do with canonicity and much more to do with ritual purity. However, he finds the claim that imparting ritual impurity was designed to protect holy scrolls from vermin incredulous since it seems a convoluted method to prevent such damage.⁴¹⁵ He also questions, in contrast with Broyde, whether the mere presence or absence of the tetragrammaton makes such a difference. The writings of heretics that contain the name of God are not holy or treated with ritual deference (*t. Shabbat* 13:5). Furthermore, a Torah scroll can impart impurity even from sections that don't contain God's name, while God's name in a non-scriptural benediction has no such power. In addition, the Tosefta expressly argues that Ecclesiastes' failure to impart impurity rests on its lack of divine inspiration: "Rabbi Simon ben Menasiah says: The Song of Songs defiles the hands because it was uttered through divine inspiration. Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands because it comes from the wisdom of Solomon" (*t. Yadayim* 2:14).⁴¹⁶

Timothy Lim distinguishes between works that are recited and the scrolls upon which they are written. The scrolls themselves have a certain sanctity. Lim points to *m. Yadayim* 3:5 which states that a holy scroll that has been erased but still contains eighty-five letters retains its ability to defile the hands. The number eighty-five is derived from the length of the passage in Numbers 10:35-36 which describes the movement of the Ark of the Covenant. Lim associates

⁴¹⁴ Sasson, מלך וידי, 59.

⁴¹⁵ Giszczak's rejection of scrolls imparting impurity as a method to protect the scrolls from vermin echoes the opinion expressed by Goodman. See Goodman, "Sacred Scripture and 'Defiling the Hands'," 100.

⁴¹⁶ Mark Giszczak, "The Canonical Status of Song of Songs in *m. Yadayim* 3.5," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 41, no. 2 (2016): 211, 215-217.

the sanctity of the Ark with the sanctity of scrolls that defile the hands. The Ark was a sacred object. If touched by someone without the authority to do so, the Ark conveyed not sanctity, but death, as evidence by the tragedy of Uzzah when he sought to right the Ark to prevent it from falling (2 Sam. 6:6-7, 1 Chr. 13:9-10). Lim argues that sacred writings work in much the same way, but on a smaller scale. Sacred scrolls do not impart sanctity, nor do they impart death, but rather they impart impurity to those who touch them without proper authority. The tannaitic discussion perhaps reflects a historic reality in which only priests were allowed to handle holy writings, and perhaps only within the Temple precincts. While this reality did not survive into the tannaitic period, the discussion of defilement of the hands survived as a vestige of that past and served as a rabbinic warning against mishandling holy writings.⁴¹⁷ If so, this would represent another instance in which the reasons behind earlier traditions are lost to rabbinic Judaism, which is forced to contend with surviving traditions without access to their original rationalization. This echoes our contention that the rabbinic tradition no longer had access to the tradition that Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were written to criticize Solomon and were forced to justify their sanctity nonetheless.

Also relying on the concept of lost traditions, Shamma Friedman argues that defilement of the hands produced by sacred writings represents a rabbinic alteration of biblical notions of the transferability of sanctity. Like impurity, holiness could originally be transmitted. For instance, the sin offering, the Altar, the Table, and the Menorah all had the power to impart holiness. As a result, non-priests were not allowed to touch them. However, in the rabbinic writings, the concept of the transferability of holiness is all but abandoned. Rather, rabbinic

⁴¹⁷ Timothy H. Lim, "The Defilement of the Hands as a Principle Determining the Holiness of Scriptures," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 61, no. 2 (Oct. 2010): 501, 503, 506, 508-511, 513-514.

halakhah maintains only the concept of the transmission of impurity. Thus, sanctified items, instead of being conveyors of holiness, are treated by the rabbis only in terms of their susceptibility to impurity. Torah scrolls began to take on greater sanctity during the period of Ezra and Nehemiah. During the tannaitic period, touching Torah scrolls required ritual washing. However, by this time the basis for such washing was to avoid defilement of the hands based on transferred impurity rather than transferrable sanctity. When the rabbis considered holy items, the only framework left to them to discuss the nature of these items was that of impurity.⁴¹⁸

Martin Goodman also argues that the original rationale for sacred writings' defilement of the hands may have been lost by the tannaitic period. However, during the late Second Temple period, synagogues stored holy scrolls in a recess in the center of the wall toward which prayer was directed. At the same time, these scrolls were deemed holy objects. The reverence shown to these scrolls may have created some discomfort as their position in the synagogue may have given the impression that the scrolls themselves were being worshipped. This practice may have taken on the appearance of the worship of objects associated with pagan idolatry. Therefore, the Pharisees may have explained Jewish hesitance to directly handle sacred scrolls to their defilement of the hands, seeking to downplay these scrolls as objects of religious reverence. The rabbis, not understanding the source of the rule on defilement, extended it beyond the scrolls themselves while limiting its reach in other cases. Thus, *t. Yadayim* 2:12 extends the holiness and attendant defilement to the straps, thongs, and wrappings of sacred scrolls,⁴¹⁹ while *m.*

⁴¹⁸ Shamma Friedman, "The Holy Scriptures Defile the Hands – The Transformation of a Biblical Concept in Rabbinic Theology," in *Minḥah le-Naḥum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honour of his 70th Birthday*, eds. Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 119, 121-123, 125-128, 130-132.

⁴¹⁹ *T. Yadayim* 2:12 states: "The thongs and straps that are sewn to the scroll, even though one is not allowed to keep them, they defile the hands. The container for scrolls and the case for scrolls and the wrappings of a scroll when

Yadayim 4:5 limits defilement to scrolls using the Aramaic block script, written on parchment, and using ink.⁴²⁰ Other forms of scrolls would not defile the hands, regardless of their content. Goodman reads this as evidence that the rabbis of the tannaitic period preserved this concept without understanding its source.⁴²¹

Whatever the origins of defilement of the hands, if the debate is about divine inspiration, and not about inclusion in the canon, then Solomon's purported role in the authorship of these texts may conceivably play an important role. If the rabbis could forget the origins of the doctrine of sacred scrolls defiling the hands, then it is even more likely that they would lose sight of the original critical intent of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. Therefore, it is not surprising that the rabbis of late antiquity took for granted that Solomon wrote the three books attributed to him.⁴²² Attributing authorship of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs to Solomon, however, did not necessarily aid their canonization.⁴²³ *The Wisdom of Solomon* is attributed to Solomon, yet it was excluded from Tanakh.⁴²⁴ Hence, *t. Yadayim* 2:14 can conclude that while the Song of Songs is divinely inspired, Ecclesiastes is not: "Rabbi Simon ben Menasiah says: The Song of Songs defiles the hands because it was said through divine inspiration. Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands because it is from the wisdom of Solomon." Ecclesiastes fails to meet

they are pure defile the hands. Blessings, even though they contain the letters of God's name and numerous passages from the Torah, do not defile the hands."

⁴²⁰ *M. Yadayim* 4:5 states: "Translation [i.e. Aramaic] that appears in Ezra and Daniel defiles the hands. Translation [Aramaic] whose source text is Hebrew, and Hebrew whose source text is translation [Aramaic], and [ancient] Hebrew script do not defile the hands. Generally, nothing defiles the hands unless it is written in Assyrian [block Aramaic] script, on parchment, and in ink."

⁴²¹ Goodman, "Sacred Scripture and 'Defiling the Hands,'" 103-105, 107.

⁴²² Hurowitz, *עם מבוא ופרוש משלי*, 559; Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," 43.

⁴²³ LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, ix; Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," 42.

⁴²⁴ Dell, "Connections to Wisdom," 10.

the test because it is merely the product of Solomon's human wisdom.⁴²⁵ In this case, Solomon's authorship arguably does not bolster Ecclesiastes' credentials, but instead downgrades them.⁴²⁶

This creates a point of conflict within scholarship. As discussed previously, so many see Solomonic attribution as one of the factors aiding the canonization of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. On the other hand, we have just shown how Solomonic authorship could be a hindrance to canonization, and how some of the books attributed to Solomon remained in the canon despite his purported authorship. Dell argues that the two positions are mutually exclusive. She concludes that ultimately canonization had much more to do with reinterpretation of problematic works, bringing them in line with Torah orthodoxy, than with Solomon's role in their composition.⁴²⁷ We see precisely this in *t. Yadayim* 2:14. Solomon's authorship seems to militate against Ecclesiastes' status as sacred. However, within the same opinion in the Tosefta, Solomonic authorship is not fatal to another work's claim to divine inspiration. The Song of Songs, also discussed in *t. Yadayim* 2:14, is also presumed to be authored by Solomon, yet this does not prevent Rabbi Simon ben Menasiah from declaring it divinely inspired. Thus, it is not Solomon's authorship per se that concerns the rabbis but rather whether there is evidence that a particular book is divinely inspired. Ecclesiastes proves the harder case because it is theologically more challenging and because as wisdom literature it is less prone to metaphorical interpretation.

⁴²⁵ Giszczak, "The Canonical Status of Song of Songs," 216-217; Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," 38-39.

⁴²⁶ Giszczak, "The Canonical Status of Song of Songs," 217.

⁴²⁷ Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom," 320, 328.

Hiding Books

Even if Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs are fully canonized and determined to be divinely inspired, the rabbis still concerned themselves with the popular perceptions or potential misperceptions regarding these works. Thus, a separate discussion appears in the rabbinic literature about efforts to hide or remove certain works attributed to Solomon. The verb used in these texts, *לגנוז*, has a connotation of withdrawal, or more literally, of hiding away. On the face of these rabbinic discussions, it is not clear whether this refers to an effort to withdraw these books from the canon, or whether they are to remain in the canon but not be available to general public access. The Talmud, in *b. Shabbat* 30b, discusses removing Ecclesiastes and Proverbs because of their self-contradictory content. *Avot deRabbi Natan* 1:1 claims that the three Solomonic works were actually removed until the Men of the Great Assembly interpreted them.⁴²⁸ Despite this claim, it is far from clear whether these books were in fact ever removed from circulation or were ever subject to any real debate over their proposed removal from the canon. The *Avot deRabbi Natan* source bases its claim of suppression by reading Proverbs 25:1 to mean that the men of Hezekiah *העתיקו*, removed, the proverbs of Solomon. The word *העתיקו* can mean removed, transcribed, or copied. Given the fluidity of the word, it is possible that this discussion of the Solomonic books' removal may reflect rabbinic concerns about the nature and contents of those texts rather than any historic effort to suppress or decanonize them.⁴²⁹

As such, this discussion about storing away books, just as with the discussion of defiling the hands, arguably has nothing to do with canonicity. The only books discussed in this context

⁴²⁸ Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 72-74, 79. Sasson notes that manuscript versions of *Avot deRabbi Natan* state that the Solomonic works were put into hiding after their composition until the men of Hezekiah were able to rescue them by interpreting them allegorically (*מלך וזדריט*, 60-62).

⁴²⁹ Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship*, 32-35, 45.

are books that exist in the canon and presumably were already in the canon at the time of this debate.⁴³⁰ Instead, this discussion may represent a theoretical discussion regarding how to read these works. Allegorical reading rescues the Solomonic works, thus giving a primacy to allegorical reading over the underlying text.⁴³¹ In addition, Solomon's reputation for magic and his involvement with demons may have rendered works attributed to him somewhat suspect and worthy of suppression.⁴³² The discussions of hiding Solomonic works acknowledge their problematic content and seek to reframe the way in which those works are read.

The major rabbinic concern is that the Solomonic works be understood within the framework of rabbinic Judaism. Thus, rabbinic treatment of the material in these works is interpreted in the Talmud and midrashic literature in ways aimed at containing their problematic material. For example, by relying on the epilogue, the Talmud (*b. Shabbat* 30b) seeks to neutralize Ecclesiastes' internal contradictions.⁴³³ Thus, the discussion in *Avot deRabbi Natan* 1:1 operates more as a homiletic story, describing the need to remove the problematic works of Solomon until they could be rescued through interpretation.⁴³⁴ Rather than constituting a discussion over canonicity or even sanctity, the discussion of hiding Solomonic works gives primacy to rabbinic exegesis. In interpreting the efforts of Hezekiah as removing Solomon's works rather than as transcribing them, the midrash in *Avot deRabbi Natan* acts as a midrashic interpretation of the text of Proverbs that reflects on the nature of midrashic interpretation. It is

⁴³⁰ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 89.

⁴³¹ Sasson, *מלך 777*, 60, 62.

⁴³² Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 78-80.

⁴³³ Sandberg, "Qohelet and the Rabbis," 39-41.

⁴³⁴ Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship*, 42, 45.

through midrashic interpretation that Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are removed, and through midrashic interpretation that they are rescued.

In addition, Leiman claims that the term *אָרְכּוּ* may not carry a negative connotation. Since it literally means to store away, this may be a reference to the deferential treatment given sacred books. Leiman sees the term as a specialty term used only for sacred objects. Thus, the sacredness of the Solomonic works and, by extension, their canonicity is not questioned by the rabbinic texts that discuss their withdrawal. Rather, these texts discuss attempts to limit their circulation for fear of fostering heretical beliefs. There is no historical evidence that any of the three Solomonic works were ever removed from the canon or even withdrawn from public circulation.⁴³⁵ In this view, once the rabbis were able to tame these books by imposing their interpretations on them, there was no longer a need to keep the public from reading Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

Interestingly, the debates about storing away books never mention Solomon. Thus, Solomon's association with Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs may play no role in the impulse to store away the books attributed to him.⁴³⁶ As with the discussion on defiling hands, Solomon's presumed authorship of these works seems to neither aid nor hinder rabbinic perceptions of their status. The discussion is divested from the historic Solomon of either Kings or Chronicles. The rabbis do have to contend with the controversial nature of these works because they have lost the tradition of the books' original intent. But in the process of doing so, they are more concerned with whether these books can be redeemed despite their controversial

⁴³⁵ Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 79, 86.

⁴³⁶ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 89-90.

content. This depends upon whether they were divinely inspired and whether they can be construed within the context of Torah piety, not upon who authored them.

Consequences of Canonization

Once a book is canonized it is subject to interpretation. While such a book becomes set as part of an established group of sacred texts, it simultaneously becomes dynamic through the application of interpretation.⁴³⁷ Thus, a book like Ecclesiastes, with its skepticism, heterodoxy, and internal contradictions, once canonized, becomes subject to exegetical interpretation, which serves to bring the problematic aspects of the text back in concert with more mainstream biblical piety. Similarly, once the Song of Songs was secured within the canon, its canonicity compelled allegorical interpretation. Because a biblical book, as a sacred text, is presumed to embody the word of God, it is also presumed to be perfect. Therefore, problematic aspects of such a text compel charitable interpretation to manifest the text in the best possible light. This interpretive impulse allows for greater flexibility in the understanding of a canonical text, which ironically runs counter to the impulse to canonize, which seeks to fix texts and traditions in the face of a multiplicity of traditions.⁴³⁸ Thus, a canonical work can easily be divested of its original intent and read out of context. Its status as a canonical work invites this treatment, especially if the original purpose of its composition is lost. In this way, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, once they were read without their anti-Solomon intent, needed to be treated allegorically to bring them in line with mainstream biblical piety. The rabbis, at least, are honest enough to discuss their difficulties in harnessing these works to their sense of theological propriety, but in the end both works remain in the canon and both are considered sacred.

⁴³⁷ Carol Bakhtos, *The Family of Abraham: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Interpretations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 15.

⁴³⁸ Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 23-24, 26, 29, 32-33.

While we have concluded that Solomon himself plays little role in the rabbinic debates about the spiritual status of the works attributed to him, the rabbinic conclusions about those books do impact subsequent evaluations of Solomon. So while Solomon does not impact canonization, canonization impacts Solomon. The rabbinic debates on the Solomonic works essentially conclude with all three works viewed as divinely inspired, fully authoritative as biblical texts, and embodying rabbinic piety via proper allegorical interpretation. This seems to be settled by tannaitic times, as *m. Yadayim* 3:5 ends with an affirmation of the report of ben Azzai that both the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes were deemed to defile the hands. Once these tenets are established, and Ecclesiastes and the Song are both understood to be the products of divine inspiration, this changes the status of Solomon himself. In Kings, Solomon is a prophet only to the extent that God communicates with him a limited number of times over the course of his lifetime, and usually just to remind him to adhere to God's commandments. Kings does credit Solomon with the composition of proverbs and songs, but these are attributed to his wisdom, not divine inspiration. The closest Kings comes to granting Solomon divine inspiration is to imply that his compositions derive from his wisdom, which is divinely granted. Any claim to divine inspiration is highly attenuated. Not even Chronicles purports to portray Solomon as the divinely inspired author of holy books.

Once the rabbis determine that Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are written through divine inspiration, they alter the Jewish image of Solomon. On the one hand, this determination confers a new level of respect on Solomon. That Solomon merits divine inspiration, to serve as a conduit for the word of God, reflects positively on Solomon. On the other hand, Solomon's sins become all the more problematic and more difficult to understand. How can the man who wrote so sublimely about the love between God and Israel have possibly abandoned God and turned to

idolatry? How can the author of Ecclesiastes, who concludes that all that is meaningful in life is to fear God and obey His commandments, have abandoned God's commandments? Chronicles faced a similar intellectual crisis in its attempt to square the Solomon of Kings with the ideal of his Temple. In order to glorify the Temple, Chronicles had to dismiss the sinfulness of Solomon. The rabbis are faced with a similar choice, but instead of justifying a sinful Solomon with the Temple, which they do not prize as highly as they prize Torah, they must square the failed Solomon of Kings with his authorship of scriptural works. And because rabbinic literature is not the product of a single author, we shall see that the solution to this dilemma will manifest itself in a myriad of approaches.

CHAPTER FOUR: SOLOMON IN CLASSICAL RABBINIC LITERATURE

4.1 Solomon in Second Temple Literature and Early Christian Writings

Before examining rabbinic midrashic responses to Solomon, we must establish the literary milieu from which rabbinic literature emerged. It is not as though nothing had been written about Solomon since the close of the biblical canon. Following the biblical period, Solomon experiences “a double reception history, part literary and part legendary.”⁴³⁹ This is to say that treatments of Solomon in the Second Temple period and in early Christian writings respond to Solomon both in reference to his scriptural sources as well as to popular legends regarding Solomon that evolve and diverge from these scriptural beginnings. Two Solomons emerge: the biblical Solomon and the magical Solomon. As we will see, rabbinic literature will also interact with these two Solomons. However, the rabbinic reaction to the magical Solomon differs from that of the Second Temple period and early Christianity.

Second Temple Literature

The magical Solomon does not emerge from nowhere. He has his origins in Scripture as well. Solomon’s reputation for the magical emerges from the description of his wisdom in 1 Kings 5:9-14.⁴⁴⁰ Solomon’s reputation for exorcism may also be attributed to his dedicatory prayer in 1 Kings 8 that culminates in God’s appearance in the Temple. Solomon seems to have the ability to summon the divine presence. Similarly, Solomon’s ability to build a Temple

⁴³⁹ Pablo A. Torijano, “Solomon and Magic,” in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 107.

⁴⁴⁰ Jesse Rainbow, “The Song of Songs and the *Testament of Solomon*: Solomon’s Love Poetry and Christian Magic,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 100, no. 3 (Jul. 2007): 251.

capable of housing the divine contributes to his reputation for spiritual powers.⁴⁴¹ In addition, the 1,005 songs described in 1 Kings 5:12 were often understood to be incantations in the same way that David was able to soothe Saul from the evil spirits that tormented him through music.⁴⁴² Thus, while the Book of Kings does not expressly credit Solomon with magical powers, its description of his special wisdom allowed readers during the Second Temple period to extrapolate that Solomon boasted esoteric talents.

Son of Sirach, Ben Sira, or Ecclesiasticus was a Jewish text originally composed in Hebrew in the early second century BCE. While it was not canonized in Tanakh, it is occasionally cited in later rabbinic literature.⁴⁴³ Its structure and style, mostly consisting of proverbs and advice, bears a striking affinity to the biblical works attributed to Solomon, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. However, despite this implied homage, its depiction of Solomon remains fundamentally faithful to his depiction in Kings. *Ben Sira* acknowledges the glories of Solomon's reign, but he blames Solomon for accumulating wealth and for causing his own downfall through his attachment to women, which ultimately caused the division of the kingdom (*Ben Sira* 47:12-21). Nothing in this description suggests Solomon enjoyed mastery over demons or other supernatural powers.

However, during the late Second Temple period, legends of Solomon's powers of magic and exorcism grew, as reflected in Greek traditions as well as in Josephus and Testament

⁴⁴¹ Angela Kim Harkins, "The *Odes of Solomon* as Solomonic Pseudepigrapha," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 25, no. 4 (2016): 255, 261.

⁴⁴² Rainbow, "Song of Songs and *Testament of Solomon*," 256.

⁴⁴³ Daniel J. Harrington, "Ecclesiasticus, or The Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, fully revised fourth edition, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010), 1457. *Ben Sira* does appear in the Apocrypha and is thus canonized in the Catholic bible.

literature.⁴⁴⁴ The oldest text to associate Solomon with the exorcising of demons was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls (11Q11 or 11QApocryphal Psalms), but this reputation may have existed well before.⁴⁴⁵ But not all Second Temple references to Solomon refer to magic. Also among the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Miqsat Ma'aseh ha-Torah* (4Q398 or 4QMMT) briefly depicts the days of Solomon as fulfilling Deuteronomic blessings.⁴⁴⁶ In either case, both the legendary Solomon and the biblical Solomon enjoy positive portrayals among the Dead Sea Scrolls. On the other hand, the Dead Sea Scrolls devote relatively little attention to Solomon. He does not seem to play much of a role for the sectarians at Qumran.

Solomon's reputation as an exorcist asserts itself in other late Second Temple writings. Pseudo-Philo, in the first century CE describes Solomon as a conqueror of demons (*Biblical Antiquities* 60).⁴⁴⁷ Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, devotes a good amount of attention to Solomon in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus bases his account almost entirely on the Bible, although he utilizes the Greek Septuagint rather than Hebrew Scripture. While Josephus generally casts Solomon in a positive light, perhaps in the model of a Greek hero, he does include some negative material in his depiction. While Josephus sees Solomon as a model of piety in his building the Temple, he does not omit Solomon's foreign wives and idolatry from his narrative. Rather, Josephus criticizes Solomon for giving into his passions. Joseph

⁴⁴⁴ Harkins, "The *Odes of Solomon*," 252; Rainbow, "The Song of Songs and the *Testament of Solomon*," 249.

⁴⁴⁵ Harkins, "The *Odes of Solomon*," 253. The portion of the scroll on which Solomon is mentioned is highly fragmentary, but it appears with repeated use of the terms "demons" and "healing" suggesting Solomon's association with exorcism. See *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, trans. Geza Vermes (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 316.

⁴⁴⁶ Albert L. A. Hogeterp, "King Solomon in the New Testament and Jewish Tradition," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 158.

⁴⁴⁷ Torijano, "Solomon and Magic, 109.

Verheyden sees this criticism as a reflection of Josephus' desire to portray the real-life foibles that beset all rulers, including biblical kings.⁴⁴⁸ However, despite Josephus' fidelity to historic truth, even he includes material regarding Solomon's association with magic, including his reputation for performing exorcisms (*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.2.5).⁴⁴⁹ In the same discussion, Josephus also reports that Solomon composed incantations.⁴⁵⁰ Thus, we see that by the first century CE, Solomon's reputation as a magician and exorcist is well established to the point that Josephus feels compelled to include that aspect of Solomon's character in his otherwise biblically based history. This same magical reputation will play an even more prominent role in Christian treatments of Solomon.

Christian Writings

The earliest Christian writings reflecting on Solomon appear in the New Testament itself. The New Testament often associates Solomon with his role as the builder of the Temple, although these references do not really reflect strongly on Solomon as much as they act as criticisms of the Temple establishment in the times of Jesus.⁴⁵¹ With regard to Solomon himself, the Gospels associate Solomon with faith in God, but they imply that Jesus supersedes Solomon, stating, "The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see,

⁴⁴⁸ Joseph Verheyden, "Josephus on Solomon," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 85, 87-88, 93-94, 99-100, 103.

⁴⁴⁹ Torijano, "Solomon and Magic, 110-111; Verheyden, "Josephus on Solomon," 92-93.

⁴⁵⁰ Harkins, "The *Odes of Solomon*," 254.

⁴⁵¹ Hogeterp, "King Solomon in the New Testament," 143, 146-148. See Acts 7:47-50 criticizing the need for a Temple.

something greater than Solomon is here!” (Matt. 12:42, Luke 11:31).⁴⁵² While these verses argue that Jesus supersedes Solomon, they still presume Solomon’s greatness.⁴⁵³ The Gospels repeatedly describe Jesus as the “Son of David,” often in connection with his working miracles, including performing exorcisms (Matt. 9:27-30, 12:22-23, 15:22-28, 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43).⁴⁵⁴ In addition, Jesus’ riding on a donkey (Luke 19:29-38) seems to parallel Solomon’s ride on David’s mule. Thus, all told, the Gospels harbor a fundamentally positive attitude toward Solomon.⁴⁵⁵ Consistent with this conclusion, the Gospels never address Solomon’s sins. Rather, their focus on Solomon is as Temple builder, sage, and exorcist.

However, one other New Testament source may reveal a negative view of Solomon. In 1 Kings 10:14, amidst a description of Solomon’s wealth, the text informs us: “And it was that the weight of the gold that came to Solomon in a single year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold.” Famously, The Revelation to John, popularly known as the Book of Revelation, seizes upon the number six hundred and sixty-six and assigns it as the number of the beast of the abyss that represents false property (Rev. 13:18). In this sense, Revelation seems to associate the

⁴⁵² Anton Wessels, *The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an: Three Books, Two Cities, One Tale*, trans. Henry Jansen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 143. Translation of the Gospels taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, fully revised fourth edition, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵³ Hogeterp, “King Solomon in the New Testament,” 160.

⁴⁵⁴ Peter Busch, “Solomon as a True Exorcist: The Testament of Solomon in its Cultural Setting,” in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 184; Torijano, “Solomon and Magic, 109. Many of these miracles include curing the blind. However, this does not necessarily make them distinct from exorcisms, as Jesus’ cure for blindness may be the result of casting out the demon that caused the blindness in the first place. Thus, all of these examples may constitute exorcisms. Even if these events all represent exorcisms, it is not entirely clear that the “Son of David” appellation is meant to invoke Solomon. It could merely be a reference to the Gospels’ claims to Jesus’ messianic status. However, the fact this particular name appears in an exorcistic context lends strength to the association and the intent to invoke Jesus in the role of Solomon the exorcist.

⁴⁵⁵ Hogeterp, “King Solomon in the New Testament,” 161-162.

injustice rendered by Solomon's corruption with the beast of false prophecy.⁴⁵⁶ Assuming the use of this number in Revelation is a deliberate allusion to the Solomon narrative, Revelation condemns Solomon in severe terms. However, the use of this number may be coincidental. There are many numbers listed in Kings' description of Solomon's wealth, business dealings, building projects, and military and equine holdings. Six hundred and sixty-six is just one of them. And even if the allusion is deliberate, the criticism is extremely veiled.

Like *Ben Sira*, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, dated to the first century CE, is actually a Jewish writing, but it was preserved in Christian circles.⁴⁵⁷ Unlike *Ben Sira*, however, the *Wisdom of Solomon* seems to attribute esoteric knowledge to Solomon. In chapter 7, Solomon, who serves as the purported narrator, claims to have divinely gifted knowledge regarding the universe, the beginning and end of times, celestial bodies, nature, spirits (or winds), human thought, as well as hidden and manifest knowledge (*Wisd. Sol.* 7:17-22). This list at the very least seems to allude to esoteric knowledge.⁴⁵⁸ This esoteric depiction of Solomon is more consistent with first century works treating him. Its preservation in Christian lore helped solidify Solomon's legendary reputation for the magical in the Christian consciousness.

This Christian tendency becomes even more pronounced in the *Testament of Solomon*, a Greek work of Christian pseudepigrapha dating from the second to fourth centuries. This work views the Song of Songs, which it accepts as Solomon's composition, through the lens of Solomon's reputation for the magical. Since the *Testament* views the Song as a description of

⁴⁵⁶ Wessels, *The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an*, 140.

⁴⁵⁷ Lester L. Grabbe, "The Wisdom of Solomon," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, Fully Revised Fourth Edition, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1427.

⁴⁵⁸ Torijano, "Solomon and Magic," 109-110.

Solomon's falling prey to sin by giving into sexual desire, it sees no need to rework the Song's sensuality through allegory.⁴⁵⁹ The *Testament* discusses Solomon's use of a signet ring (*Test. Sol.* 1:5-7), which he uses to control demons. It also features an exchange between Solomon and the demon Asmodeus, who depicts himself as the offspring of a human woman and an angelic father (1:21).⁴⁶⁰ The *Testament* relies on its readers' familiarity with demons such as Asmodeus and Beelzebub from other New Testament sources, making it a wholly Christian text.⁴⁶¹ While not really an exegetical treatment of the Song, the *Testament* mines the Song of Songs for material to support its esoteric portrayal of Solomon. Thus, for example, the signet ring is the seal on the beloved's heart (Song 8:6), and Solomon *magus*, or magical Solomon, of the *Testament* controls the winds the beloved calls the winds to blow on his garden (Song 4:16). Jesse Rainbow argues that since the *Testament* reads the Song as a record of Solomon's downfall, one can also attribute his failure not just to the allure of carnal pleasure, but to his participation in the magical as well.⁴⁶²

However, Peter Busch sees the *Testament* as a practical text regarding demons and how to thwart them, reflecting practical interest in demonology common to multiple religions at that time. Christians did not view exorcism negatively. Early Christians viewed baptism as a form of exorcism. Rather, the *Testament of Solomon* addresses the issue of whether exorcisms are best performed by any Christian in the name of Jesus or only by select followers, an issue that was being debated in the fourth century. The *Testament* seems to take the position that only select

⁴⁵⁹ Rainbow, "Song of Songs and *Testament of Solomon*," 250-251, 255-256.

⁴⁶⁰ Harkins, "The *Odes of Solomon*," 255, 260.

⁴⁶¹ Busch, "Solomon as a True Exorcist," 189-190.

⁴⁶² Rainbow, "Song of Songs and *Testament of Solomon*," 258, 266-268, 271, 274.

Christians, namely officers of the Church, may perform such exorcisms. In addition, Solomon's purported signet ring was one of the relics housed in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. In this sense, the *Testament of Solomon* serves as marketing material for that church and its exorcism services.⁴⁶³

The Esoteric Solomon

In looking at all of these sources, Jules Janssens notes, "All this makes clear that a wizard-like Solomon very much existed in both Jewish and Christian circles during the Common Era's early centuries, and moreover that this magic was conceived as something positive, e.g., allowing to effectuate exorcisms."⁴⁶⁴ Solomon's esoteric reputation grew during the Second Temple period and expanded in late antiquity through the Middle Ages.⁴⁶⁵ Because of this reputation, Solomon appears and is invoked in magical texts throughout these periods. As early as the fourth century CE, Solomon's name and his signet ring are invoked in amulets and incantation bowls designed to ward off demons in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. *Sefer ha-Razim*, literally "the book of secrets," a book of Jewish magic written in the fifth to sixth centuries CE, credits Solomon with the receipt of special astrological knowledge, as do other Jewish texts of that period. While these esoteric approaches are found amongst Jewish, pagan, and Christian traditions, Solomon's reputation for magic continued to have marked influence in Christian thought into the late Middle Ages. The *Key of Solomon* was a magic text written in Latin that had wide circulation in the fifteenth century.⁴⁶⁶ Rainbow contends that the Solomon

⁴⁶³ Busch, "Solomon as a True Exorcist," 183-185, 191-194.

⁴⁶⁴ Jules Janssens, "The Ikhwān Aṣ-Ṣafā' on King-Prophet Solomon," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, edited by Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 248.

⁴⁶⁵ Harkins, "The *Odes of Solomon*," 273.

⁴⁶⁶ Torijano, "Solomon and Magic," 107, 115, 118-122.

magus tradition “was the basis of his continuing significance in Christian thought and practice.” Christian readers read the description of his wisdom in the Book of Kings as reflecting magical knowledge rather than scientific knowledge. They construed Hezekiah’s efforts to suppress the Solomonic works as an effort to suppress esoteric works. Even Hippolytus’ support of such a move tacitly affirms this association of Solomon with esoteric knowledge.⁴⁶⁷ The popularity of the esoteric Solomon from late antiquity on even obscured the normative, biblical Solomon despite its radical reworking of the original character.⁴⁶⁸

Even though the magical Solomon existed in Jewish, pagan, and Christian traditions, this esoteric figure played a larger role in Christian lore than in Jewish traditions. This is reflected in esoteric images of Solomon in the Gospels, Christian preservation of apocryphal works depicting Solomon as an exorcist, Christian pseudepigrapha such as the *Testament of Solomon*, and the persistence of Solomon’s reputation for magic well into the eighteenth century. Jewish sources also reflect the esoteric Solomon. However, rabbinic literature, as we will see, takes a far more negative view of Solomon’s magical powers and facility for exorcism. If anything, rabbinic midrash seeks to minimize Solomon’s magical reputation in favor of the more historic, biblical Solomon. As such, rabbinic literature mindfully departs from the Second Temple and early Christian depictions of Solomon. Whether it does so in reaction to Christian attitudes or whether this departure merely reflects rabbinic distaste for popular magic is less clear and perhaps may form the topic of further research in the study of rabbinics.

⁴⁶⁷ Rainbow, “Song of Songs and *Testament of Solomon*,” 251-252, 257-258.

⁴⁶⁸ Torijano, “Solomon and Magic, 122-123.

4.2 Introduction to Midrashic Sources

As with most topics addressed in rabbinic midrashic literature, there is no unified rabbinic position on Solomon. There are sources that praise him as well as sources that criticize him.⁴⁶⁹ This is because rabbinic literature is the collective writings of rabbis over the course of late antiquity and into the early Middle Ages. Early rabbinic sources emerge at the beginning of the rabbinic movement, which begins toward the end of the Second Temple period, approximately the beginning of the first century CE. The production of classical rabbinic literature continues until the beginning of the geonic period, roughly in the seventh century. In truth, however, rabbinic literature of this period continues into the early middle ages and into the geonic period as material continued to be compiled and edited into many of the later midrashic collections. Thus, the greater period of classical rabbinic literature saw the composition and compilation of the Mishnah, the Tosefta, both Talmuds, and the major midrashic collections, as well as smaller works from the same period.

The texts that we will examine are almost entirely aggadic midrash. They deal with rabbinic interpretations of narrative biblical material. The rabbis considered midrash part of the oral tradition of the Oral Torah along with halakhic traditions regarding the legal interpretation of the Torah.⁴⁷⁰ Aggadic midrash seeks to extrapolate meaning from biblical narrative. Rabbinic midrash presumes that Tanakh is divine in origin and that, as a result, the biblical text is pregnant with meaning. Midrash often focuses on a single verse or small set of verses at a time. However, any verse in the entirety of Tanakh is available to elucidate the meaning of any other

⁴⁶⁹ Sasson, *מגילת ודדד*, 163.

⁴⁷⁰ Steven D. Fraade, "Concepts of Scripture in Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 31-32.

verse.⁴⁷¹ Midrash is usually either exegetical or homiletic in purpose, although any particular midrash can embody both impulses. The former approach seeks to understand the biblical text in its context. The latter uses the biblical text as a jumping point from which to impart a religious lesson. Since midrash is open to personalized and inventive interpretation, either approach will reveal rabbinic attitudes toward the underlying scriptural text. The rabbinic readings of Solomon prove no exception.

Before we examine the rabbinic literature, it behooves us to discuss some of the collections in which the midrashim we will examine appear. We will see a number of midrashim from both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. Both Talmuds are primarily halakhic works, elucidating and expanding the legal principles set forth in the Mishnah. However, both Talmuds are prone to discourse beyond matters halakhic and will digress to other topics, including aggadic midrash. The creative production of the Palestinian Talmud probably ended in the late fourth century or early fifth century CE, but editorial activity probably continued for quite a while after that.⁴⁷² The Babylonian Talmud closed in approximately 600.⁴⁷³ Both the Palestinian Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud feature a post-amoraic anonymous editorial level. The Palestinian Talmud never cites the Babylonian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud never cites the Palestinian Talmud. However, both Talmuds cite amoraim from both Palestine and Babylon, and both Talmuds share many of the same traditions. Palestinian traditions reflected in the

⁴⁷¹ Benjamin D. Sommer, "Concepts of Scriptural Language in Midrash," in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 66-69.

⁴⁷² Sacha Stern, "The Talmud Yerushalmi," in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine*, eds. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 145.

⁴⁷³ Richard Kalmin, "Problems in the Use of the Babylonian Talmud for the History of Late-Roman Palestine: The Example of Astrology," in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine*, eds. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 166.

Babylonian Talmud may be accurate, but they may also reflect reworking of those traditions or even original writing expressing Babylonian concerns and perspectives.⁴⁷⁴ Because the Babylonian Talmud closed after the Palestinian Talmud did, its midrashic traditions often reflect greater elaboration. With regard to the Solomonic works, most talmudic references to Ecclesiastes use it as a source of prooftexts for halakhic propositions. However, the Talmud also provides some exegetical material on Ecclesiastes.⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, the Song of Songs is often cited in both Talmuds as well as in midrashic literature.⁴⁷⁶

In addition to talmudic traditions, we will be examining midrashim culled from the various midrashic collections. There is no midrashic collection dedicated to Kings or Chronicles. However, there are midrashic collections specifically dedicated to Solomonic works. *Midrash Mishlei* is a midrashic collection on Proverbs. It functions as a commentary on Proverbs and was composed sometime between the closing of the Babylonian Talmud and the ninth century.⁴⁷⁷

Midrash Qohelet, also known as *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, dates to approximately the sixth through eighth century, possibly originating around 600 CE.⁴⁷⁸ Hirshman dates this work to earlier in that time-frame, before the final close of the Babylonian Talmud based on the reported

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 167-169; Stern, "The Talmud Yerushalmi," 143-144.

⁴⁷⁵ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 29.

⁴⁷⁶ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 35.

⁴⁷⁷ H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 324.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 318; Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 24; Marc Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes: Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity," *HUC Annual*, 59 (1988): 137.

existence of midrashic collections for all the books of Tanakh (y. *Horayot* 83:7).⁴⁷⁹ This work relates the verses of Ecclesiastes to biographical material on Solomon from Kings and Chronicles. Its primary focus, however, is not on Solomon but on a wide variety of topics. Furthermore, in its treatment of Ecclesiastes, its larger focus on allegory leaves less room for interpretation about Solomon and less concern that Solomon be the book's author.⁴⁸⁰ However, *Midrash Qohelet* does presume that Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes and that he wrote it through divine inspiration. *Midrash Qohelet*, in sharp contrast to the tannaitic discussions of the status of Ecclesiastes, unequivocally designates Solomon a prophet. While the midrash does not read Ecclesiastes as a prophetic vision of Israel's future, it does understand the words to be divinely granted to Solomon through prophecy.⁴⁸¹ *Midrash Qohelet* utilizes allegory to rework Ecclesiastes into an orthodox work embracing divine justice while promoting Torah study and the performance of God's commandments.⁴⁸²

Song of Songs Rabbah reads the Song of Songs as describing the urgent love between God and Israel.⁴⁸³ This metaphor finds its source in biblical material. As we have previously discussed, prophetic works often cast Israel as God's wife, thus allowing them to emphasize Israel's dependence on God as well His esteem for Israel.⁴⁸⁴ While the Mishnah still debates the

⁴⁷⁹ Marc Hirshman, מדרש קהלת רבה א-ג [Midrash Qohelet Rabbah 1-6], (Jerusalem: Schechter Inst., 2016), xvii-ix, cix.

⁴⁸⁰ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 24, 94.

⁴⁸¹ Marc Hirshman, "נבואת שלמה ורוח הקודש במדרש קהלת רבה" ["The Prophecy of King Solomon and Rūaḥ HaKodesh in Midrash Qohelet Rabbah"], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 1 (Winter 1982): 7-8, 10.

⁴⁸² Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 24-25.

⁴⁸³ Penelope Robin Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs" (PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 2010), 103; Jacob Neusner, *Israel's Love Affair with God: Song of Songs* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993) 1.

⁴⁸⁴ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 335-336.

holiness of the Song of Songs, as we have seen, the issue is well settled by the sixth to eighth centuries when this midrashic collection was written,⁴⁸⁵ allowing *Song of Songs Rabbah* to presume the Song's holiness.⁴⁸⁶ And since the rabbis understood the Solomonic works as tools for understanding the Torah, *Song of Songs Rabbah* functions less as an interpretation of the Song of Songs, and more as an interpretation of the Torah. Thus, as with most midrashim, *Song of Songs Rabbah* serves to confirm the rabbinic understanding of the Torah and the rabbinic worldview. *Song of Songs Rabbah* has few extant manuscripts demonstrating that it was not copied much and probably experienced narrow distribution. This also contributed to a more stable text. It is written in mishnaic Hebrew with some Aramaic and a few Greek loanwords. While this makes it consonant with a mid sixth century composition date, these feature may merely reflect the preservation of older traditions within the work.⁴⁸⁷

In addition to the midrashim specifically dedicated to Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, midrashim from other collections also address Solomon. We will see midrashim from all five collections of the *Midrash Rabbah* on the Torah.⁴⁸⁸ Although *Midrash Rabbah*, because of its title, presents itself as a single work, it actually compiles five disparate midrashic works, each addressing a single book of the Torah. *Genesis Rabbah* is an exegetical midrash on Genesis dating to the first half of the fifth century CE. *Exodus Rabbah*, a later work, has an exegetical part and a homiletic part, the first part predating the second, which may date to the tenth century.

⁴⁸⁵ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 56; Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 83; Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 315.

⁴⁸⁶ Neusner, *Israel's Love Affair*, 3.

⁴⁸⁷ Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 80-83, 95-96, 105.

⁴⁸⁸ All citations to *Midrash Rabbah* are to the Vilna manuscript.

Leviticus Rabbah is a homiletic collection on Leviticus redacted sometime in the fifth century. *Numbers Rabbah* features both exegetical and homiletic components, with the two parts being brought together probably in the early thirteenth century. *Deuteronomy Rabbah* really belongs with the *Tanhuma* group of midrashim as it functions as a collection of homiletic sermons dating anywhere from 450 to 800 CE. We will also examine midrashim coming from a number of other collections. *Sifre Deuteronomy* focuses on the book of Deuteronomy and, as a result, primarily focuses on halakhic issues. It is halakhic midrash and a work of the tannaim. However, it does address the narrative portions of Deuteronomy as well. It is a very early rabbinic work, seeing final redaction in the third century CE. Like *Sifre Deuteronomy*, *Sifre Zutta* is a halakhic midrash on the book of Numbers dating to the tannaitic period or as late as the third century CE. *Seder Olam* focuses on the chronology of events from creation until the Bar Kokhba revolt and was probably redacted in early amoraic times with later revisions. *Tanhuma* is a homiletic midrash, also known as *Yelamdenu*, that exists in two separate editions, and which seems to have been redacted by about the year 400 CE. In many respects, the *Tanhuma* is less a single midrashic collection and more a group of homiletic midrashim that have been transmitted in many versions reflecting their continued growth and development over the centuries. *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* is a homiletic midrash arranged around festivals and special Sabbaths. It was redacted sometime in the third to fifth centuries. *Pesikta Rabbati* also functions as a collection of sermons for festivals and special Sabbaths. As a composite work with no discernible redactor, it is extremely difficult to date, with material originating as early as the third century and reaching final form perhaps in the sixth or seventh centuries. *Ruth Rabbah*, originally known as *Midrash Ruth*, is a commentary on the book of Ruth completed by about 500 CE. *Midrash*

Tehillim is a midrashic collection on Psalms gathered from various sources taking final form between the geonic period and the thirteenth century.⁴⁸⁹

Finally, before examining the midrashic sources themselves, it is worth contemplating the relationship between Jewish and Christian scriptural exegesis during this period. Christian interpretation of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, was cognizant of Jewish exegetical efforts, as the interpretations of the two rival traditions often competed with each other. For example, Hirshman argues there is some evidence suggesting that Origen's third century commentary on the Song of Songs draws on Jewish sources, especially since his mystical approach seems to echo material in *Song of Songs Zuta* regarding the holiness of the book. At the very least, Origen's mystical approach, rendering the Song as an expression of the soul's desire for Jesus, indicates shared mystical attitudes toward the Song during that period. Similarly, Jerome's fourth century commentary on Ecclesiastes also seems to reflect familiarity with Jewish sources. In letters, Jerome expresses knowledge of some midrashic material, and his commentary bears similarities to *Midrash Qohelet*, which is consistent with his habit of compiling commentaries from multiple sources, both Christian and Jewish. Unlike Origen, Jerome's commentary focuses on the literal meaning of the scriptural text, but he was able to enlist midrashic sources in support of this effort.⁴⁹⁰

As we will see, Jewish sources were often cognizant of Christian attitudes as well. For example, rabbinic attention to Ecclesiastes may have been spurred by Christian attraction to the book and by Christian interpretive strategies. As we have seen with Origen, Christians related

⁴⁸⁹ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 269-271, 273, 277, 279, 289, 291, 293, 295-297, 299-310, 317, 322-323, 326.

⁴⁹⁰ Hirshman, *Rivalry of Genius*, 1, 8-9, 85-90, 96, 100-104, 106. Hirshman concedes that deriving causation, influence, and even evidence of deliberate polemic from texts is difficult at best. However one can note parallels between texts (90, 93-94).

the book to the Church, hence the name Ecclesiastes. Thus, *Midrash Qohelet* may reflect anti-Christian polemics or the Jewish voice in Christian-Jewish dialogues.⁴⁹¹ While it is often difficult to demonstrate the existence of direct polemic, we will entertain the possibility with some of the Solomonic traditions in rabbinic literature.

4.3 Major Midrashic Traditions

In this section, we will examine major midrashic traditions about Solomon. Because the corpus of midrashic literature is so large, I have made no attempt to create an exhaustive examination of every midrash relating to Solomon. Rather, I attempt to identify significant midrashic traditions, emphasizing those that reflect on Solomon's character in one way or another. This process is admittedly subjective, since it relies on my own determination of which midrashim are significant and which are not. However, my goal is to provide a sense of the varying attitudes toward Solomon in classical rabbinic literature and to discuss their significance.⁴⁹² In comparison with David, rabbinic literature devotes less material to Solomon.⁴⁹³ This, however, may be reflective more of the amount of biblical space Solomon occupies relative to David than lack of interest. Regardless, there is plenty of material on Solomon. What will emerge is a broad range of responses to Solomon, many critical, many apologetic, and a few unapologetically positive. Apologetic tendencies within rabbinic midrash are common. The rabbis tend to cast biblical figures, especially Israel's progenitors, in a positive

⁴⁹¹ Hirshman, *מדרש קהלת רבה*, lvii-lviii.

⁴⁹² For a more exhaustive treatment of midrashic traditions on Solomon, see Sasson, *מלך ונביא*. This section of the dissertation relies heavily on Sasson's work, although I have organized the material somewhat differently, added a few midrashim that Sasson omits, and arrived at some disparate conclusions.

⁴⁹³ Gerhard Langer, "Solomon in Rabbinic Literature," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 127.

light.⁴⁹⁴ With Solomon, however, we will witness a greater willingness to address the darker sides of the monarch's character.

Solomon's Wisdom

Much midrashic material praises Solomon's wisdom. The nature of Solomon's wisdom is curious, especially since Solomon exhibits wisdom before God grants his request for wisdom, nowhere more so than in the request itself. It takes a certain wisdom to recognize the value of wisdom.⁴⁹⁵ However, rabbinic traditions praising this request for wisdom imbue the request with piety. For example, *Midrash Mishlei* 1:1 not only praises Solomon for requesting wisdom, but depicts him as fasting for forty days before making this request. *Sifre Deuteronomy* 9 describes the divinely gifted wisdom as the ability to judge truly according to Torah law.⁴⁹⁶ This line of commentary recasts Solomon in the image of the rabbis.⁴⁹⁷ Similarly, a number of midrashim give Solomon credit for developing halakhot (*b. Shabbat* 14b-15a; *b. Eruvin* 21b), and others praise him for his exegetical efforts in developing meaning from Scripture (*b. Eruvin* 21b; *b. Yevamot* 21a; *Num. Rab.* 19:3; *Song Rab.* 1:8; *PRK* 4, פרה אדומה [3]). This impulse to rein in Solomon's wisdom within the confines of the Torah reveals a rabbinic discomfort with the nature of Solomon's wisdom. Perhaps it is too secular in nature, or perhaps the rabbis saw it, like Hellenistic philosophy, as a rival to Jewish wisdom stemming from the Torah. In either

⁴⁹⁴ Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham*, 49.

⁴⁹⁵ David Berger, "'The Wisest of All Men,': Solomon's Wisdom in Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Book of Kings," in *Hazon Nahum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, eds. Yaakov Elman and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Hoboken NJ: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 94.

⁴⁹⁶ Sasson, מלך ודוד, 17-18.

⁴⁹⁷ Langer, "Solomon in Rabbinic Literature," 140-141; Sandra R. Shimoff, "The Hellenization of Solomon in Rabbinic Texts," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 457.

case, they reconfigure this wisdom to make it their own. However, the rabbis seem willing to laud Solomon's secular wisdom when it comes to an issue of national pride. Thus, a line of midrashim celebrate Solomon's ability to outwit Pharaoh Neḥo. The Pharaoh sends him laborers who are doomed to die within the year, but Solomon sees through the trick and sends them back (*Num. Rab.* 19:3; *Qoh. Rab.* 7:23 [1]; *Tanh. Hukat* 6).

While these midrashim praise Solomon's wisdom, others are more skeptical. A series of midrashim (*Song Rab.* 1:9; *Mid. Qoh.* 1:1 [1]; *Pes. Rab.* 14 [Parah]; *Tanh. Hukat* 6) liken Solomon to a servant or friend of the king for whom the king offers to fulfill any request. Rather than requesting money or power, the servant/friend asks to marry the king's daughter, knowing that wealth and perhaps even the throne will follow. This particular tradition both praises Solomon for his cleverness, yet portrays that cleverness as highly self-serving. Furthermore, it is wealth and marriages that ultimately lead to Solomon's downfall.⁴⁹⁸ By associating the request with both, this midrashic tradition suggests a critical view of Solomon's request for wisdom. As a result, Solomon's request for wisdom is met with both praise and criticism, but even the praise reveals concerns about Solomon's wisdom that prompt apologetic exegesis.

Song of Songs Rabbah 1:8 discusses Solomon's relationship to the Torah. The midrash states that Solomon "gave handles for the Torah." In other words, he made the Torah more popularly accessible. The midrash bases this conclusion on 1 Kings 5:12, in which Solomon composes his thousands of parables and songs. The midrash characterizes these efforts, the creation of parables, as exegesis, explanations that allow people to understand the material contained within the Torah. In this way, the rabbis viewed Proverbs and the Song of Songs, if

⁴⁹⁸ Sasson, *שיר השירים רבה*, 17-21. Sasson notes that an original manuscript of *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:9 uses the allegory of a bandit instead of the king's servant (19). The connotation of Solomon as a bandit is unquestionably critical (23-24).

not all of Nevi'im and Ketuvim, as tools for unlocking the meaning of the Torah. In so doing, the rabbis created direct connections between the allegories contained in the Song and those contained in the Torah, connecting the two texts together.⁴⁹⁹ In addition, the rabbis cast Solomon as an early rabbi, writing his three works as midrashic explanations of the Torah. Once again, the rabbinic impulse to recast Solomon's wisdom in rabbinic terms reveals a discomfort with the nature of that wisdom. It is noteworthy that *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:8 begins with a statement that Solomon wrote through divine inspiration. This contention reveals the discomfort the rabbis felt for the texts of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. They project their need to read those texts allegorically onto Solomon, who in turn uses those texts to extract allegorical meaning from the Torah.

The way in which Solomon utilizes his God-given wisdom also receives mixed treatment. A number of sources respond to his judgment of the two prostitutes. As we might expect, some treatments are positive, and some are negative. A couple of midrashim (*Deut. Rab.* 5:6; *Mid. Qoh.* 10:16[1]) actually derive halakhah regarding judicial procedure from the narrative of Solomon's judgment of the two prostitutes.⁵⁰⁰ As such, these midrashim view Solomon's conduct of the trial positively. Another line of midrashic tradition (*Ruth Rab.* 2:2; *Sifre Beha'alotecha* 78; *Sifre Zutta* 10:29), in which Ruth merits to live long enough to see Solomon's judicial handling of the case of the two prostitutes, clearly portrays Solomon's conduct as a triumph. Yet another tradition (*Song Rab.* 1:10; *Mid. Teh.* Ps. 72:1) justifies Solomon's break from normal legal procedure as an act of *imitatio dei*. Presumably, Solomon's divinely granted

⁴⁹⁹ Daniel Boyarin, "שני מבואות למדרש שיר השירים" ["Two Introductions to the Midrash on the 'Song of Songs'"], *Tarbiz*, 56 (Summer 1987): 479, 481-484.

⁵⁰⁰ *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 5:6 derives the procedural requirement that judges repeat witness testimony. *Midrash Qohelet* 10:16[1] learns the order of examination from the narrative.

wisdom allowed him to judge people in the same way God does, without need for the safeguards of jurisprudential procedure. However, *b. Rosh Hashanah* 21b criticizes Solomon for administering justice viscerally instead of according to mandated procedural safeguards. Furthermore, *Midrash Qohelet* 10:16 gives voice to Rabbi Judah who claims he would have choked Solomon for putting the baby into mortal jeopardy. Rabbi Judah is countered by Solomon's anthropomorphized wisdom, which argues that Solomon's ruling was foretold. Thus, Solomon was acting through divine inspiration. This midrash and others (*b. Makkot* 23b; *Gen. Rab.* 85:12) discuss the intervention of a heavenly voice in the judgment. It is unclear from these sources whether the heavenly voice is merely confirming the wisdom of Solomon's ruling or actively correcting it. In either case, the heavenly voice's intercession implies a divine concern about the case that requires such intercession.⁵⁰¹

The midrashim deriving halakhah from Solomon's decision as well as the midrashim that place Ruth in Solomon's court to experience his wisdom seem wholly uncritical. They are not even apologetic in the sense that they are not responding to a problematic aspect of the Solomon narrative. However, the midrashic tradition that has Solomon rule like God is most certainly concerned with his departure from judicial procedure. Solomon arrives at his decision without adhering to the procedural requirements normally followed in rabbinic jurisprudence. Specifically, Solomon adjudicates without hearing testimony from non-party witnesses and without administering warnings to the parties. A midrash that justifies this conduct is doing so because it acknowledges the problematic nature of Solomon's judgment. *Midrash Qohelet's* resort to divine inspiration to justify Solomon's departure from judicial procedure relies on the

⁵⁰¹ Gilad Sasson, "שְׁמֵלֶכָה נָעַר: 'הַשְּׂגוֹת חַז"ל עַל מִשְׁפָּטוֹ שֶׁל שְׁלֹמֹה" ["Woe to You, Land Whose King is a Youth': The Sages' Understanding of Solomon's Judgment"], *Bet Mikra*, 49, no. 4 (2004): 191-198; Sasson, *מלך ומדייט*, 24-29.

same divine inspiration that was hotly debated in our discussion of defilement of the hands. Once the rabbis credit Solomon with divine inspiration, they can utilize it to give Solomon license to exceed normal procedural safeguards in judgment.

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the canonicity or sacredness of the books attributed to Solomon turned to a great degree on whether or not they were written through divine inspiration. The debate over whether Solomon received divine inspiration or even prophecy reflects yet another source of differing rabbinic evaluations of Solomon's wisdom. In Kings, God reveals himself to Solomon multiple times. Yet the sages had difficulty proclaiming him a prophet. *B. Sotah* 48b lists Solomon as a prophet, but his name is missing in a written manuscript of the same text as well as from the parallel text in the Palestinian Talmud (*y. Sotah* 9:13). The rabbis were more comfortable attributing divine inspiration to Solomon, as we saw in the discussion of the canonicity of the three Solomonic works. *Sifre Deuteronomy* 1 discusses his role as a prophet in writing his three works, but the vast majority of texts on this subject attribute his authorship to divine inspiration or even merely his own wisdom. Several texts employ the formula "Solomon in his wisdom," שלמה בהכמתו, seemingly in an effort to distinguish Solomon's writings and accomplishments from prophecy or even divine inspiration.⁵⁰²

Midrash Qohelet stands in contrast in its willingness to call Solomon a prophet. In addition, its discussion of Solomon's parables and their multiplicity of meaning cast his words in the same light as words of Torah, worthy of deep study to derive deeper meaning (*Mid. Qoh.* 7:23). This implies that Ecclesiastes was divinely inspired and represents the word of God. Once the words of Ecclesiastes become God's words, they are inoculated from their heretical

⁵⁰² Sasson, מלך ודדיוט, 36-37. Of course, despite the repeated use of this formula, the final verdict, emerging as early as the time of the Mishnah, is that all of the Solomonic works were the product of divine inspiration, as we have discussed in the previous chapter.

sense. The divine nature of Ecclesiastes was a hallmark of many of the early Church Fathers' approaches to the book, emphasizing Solomon's role as a prophet or even portraying the text as the words of Jesus. This approach may have influenced Jewish exegesis, especially as it manifests itself in *Midrash Qohelet*.⁵⁰³ As we examine rabbinic responses to Christian exegesis, it is inherently difficult to explain why rabbinic literature will respond to such external influences in one way and not another. For example, when posed with a Christian response to a particular issue, the rabbis may just as easily reject that position and counter with a contrary position. Or Jewish exegetes may adopt that external position and do it one better, so to speak. As such, it becomes very difficult to establish that any particular rabbinic position acts as a response to contemporary Christian positions or vice versa. That being said, we can discern larger trends within Jewish exegesis as they emerge over time. One such trend is a greater willingness on the part of the rabbis to treat Solomon as a prophet within the context of the three biblical works attributed to him.

As we have discussed, *Midrash Qohelet* is a somewhat later midrashic collection dating to the sixth through eighth centuries. Its designation of Solomon as a prophet may have been the result of pressure from Christian exegesis that placed an emphasis on Solomon's righteousness and role as a prophet combined with a sense of propriety. Earlier midrashic traditions, on the other hand, seem more hesitant to confer prophecy on Solomon. It could be that the rabbis felt a bit freer to credit Solomon with divine inspiration because of the implications this has for how they understood the Solomonic works. Prophecy, however, implies more direct communication from God. Within the context of a literary work, prophecy would suggest that God dictated the book to Solomon word for word. This does not resolve the problematic nature of the Solomonic

⁵⁰³ Hirshman, "גבואת שלמה ורוח הקודש במדרש קהלת רבה," 11-14.

works since it prompts the question of why God would write a book so filled with skepticism or sensuality. Divine inspiration splits the difference. It still grants the books divine authority but also accounts for their challenging content. They are not the direct word of God, but rather represent God's message filtered through the human wisdom of Solomon.

We also find mixed rabbinic responses to the extent of Solomon's wisdom. Much of the treatment of Solomon's wisdom casts it in the mold of rabbinic halakhic expertise. In addition, the midrashic sources seem content to allow Solomon special expertise on animals and plants (*Num. Rab.* 19:3; *Song Rab.* 1:9; *Mid. Qoh.* 1:1[1]). However, the rabbis seem keen to set limitations on Solomon's wisdom. In *Midrash Qohelet* 12:1[10], God rebuffs Solomon's attempts to learn the secrets of the rewards of following God's commandments and the timing of the end of days. Similarly, Solomon seeks to understand cosmic mysteries, yet he cannot understand the halakhic mysteries of the red heifer (*Num. Rab.* 19:3; *PRK* 4, פרה אדומה [3]; *Tanh. Hukat* 6) or the four species (*Lev. Rab.* 30:15; *Tanh. Emor* 20). The rabbis treat Solomon's attempts to master hidden knowledge with skepticism. This reflects the rabbis' preference for their own halakhic mastery over Solomon's purported mystical wisdom.⁵⁰⁴ It may also reflect a general rabbinic skepticism about magical knowledge beyond the scope of rabbinic control and which posed a threat to rabbinic authority.⁵⁰⁵ Hence, we see a general rabbinic tendency to downplay Solomon's reputation for esoteric knowledge, including secrets of magic and power over demons. In this sense, rabbinic literature departs markedly from Second Temple literature and from Christian literary depictions of Solomon as magician and exorcist. The rejection of Solomon *magus* in rabbinic literature may act as anti-pagan or anti-Christian polemic. It may,

⁵⁰⁴ Sasson, מגלך וקדושים, 39-41, 44-45.

⁵⁰⁵ Jason Sion Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 137.

however, merely reflect a broader rabbinic distaste for popular magic which resembles pagan beliefs and undermines rabbinic authority. Even where Solomon's wisdom is redirected to Torah learning, we see occasional rabbinic skepticism. *Midrash Qohelet* 2:11[1] states that Solomon would learn Torah and forget it. Since there is no questioning Solomon's intellect, this midrash implies that his heart was not in learning Torah.

Underlying the rabbinic dismissal of Solomon's wisdom is the problem it poses. Solomon's wisdom fails to prevent him from sinning.⁵⁰⁶ Thus, unimpressed by Solomon's wisdom, one rabbinic tradition blames Solomon's wisdom for his downfall.

And Rabbi Isaac said: For what reason were the reasons of the Torah not revealed? For here two scriptural texts revealed their reasons, and the greatest in the world was tripped up by them. It is written: "He shall not multiply wives for himself [so that his heart will not turn]." Solomon said: I will multiply, and I will not turn. And it is written: "And it was in Solomon's old age, his wives turned his heart." And it is written: "He shall not multiply horses for himself [so that he will not return the people to Egypt]," and Solomon said: I will multiply, and I will not return. And it is written: "And a chariot would come out of Egypt for six [hundred shekels of silver], etc." (*b. Sanhedrin* 21b).

In this text, Solomon's great sin is not so much that he violated the kingly prohibitions in Deuteronomy 17, but that he thought that he could outsmart the Torah. Solomon presumes that he understands the purpose of the commandments and can circumvent their prohibitions simply by avoiding the unwanted consequences. His confidence in the power of his own wisdom is his undoing. As in a Greek tragedy, the Talmud's portrayal of Solomon's hubris not only fails to preserve him from sin but affirmatively guarantees his failure. Similarly, *Exodus Rabbah* 6:1 has the letter *yud* complain that Solomon is trying to eradicate it from the Torah by amassing wealth, horses, and women while presuming that he can do so without sinning. This criticism is echoed

⁵⁰⁶ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 153, 161-162.

in the midrashim that explicate the name Lemuel, which the rabbis read as a pseudonym for Solomon, as “he spoke against God,” claiming he could amass without sinning (*Song. Rab.* 1:10; *Mid. Qoh.* 1:2). These midrashim castigate Solomon’s pride in his own wisdom. Solomon’s self-assuredness that he can violate the letter of the law without violating the spirit of the law is really an attempt to outsmart God.⁵⁰⁷

Solomon’s pride in his own wisdom is pilloried in a talmudic story in which Solomon tries to defeat death:

There were two Cushim who stood before Solomon, “Elihoref and Ahiya, the sons of Shisha, scribes” [1 Kg. 4:3] of Solomon. One day, he [Solomon] saw that the angel of death was sad. He said to him: Why are you sad? He said to him: Because these two Cushim that sit there are required of me. [Solomon] handed them over to demons and sent them to the town of Luz. When they reached the town of Luz, they died. The next day [Solomon] saw that the angel of death was happy. He said to him: Why are you happy? He said to him: The place where they were required of me is where you sent them (*b. Sukkah* 53a).

Solomon presumes he can outsmart death by sending his scribes to the town of Luz, a town that midrashic tradition holds is impervious to death. His efforts to save his scribes guarantee their demise. Solomon’s attempt to outsmart death parallels his effort to outsmart God. Solomon seeks to stand outside the bounds of humanity, to be God-like in his power over life and death. His use of demons only confirms this judgment. In the end, Solomon is made to look the fool, and death laughs at him. His efforts to outsmart death are no more successful than his efforts to outsmart God.

With a few exceptions, the midrashic literature evinces a rabbinic discomfort with Solomon’s wisdom. Mostly, their concern is that this wisdom purports to be beyond that of the

⁵⁰⁷ Sasson, *שִׁיחַ לְמִיכָאֵל*, 112; Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 162-163.

Torah. Therefore, they constrain Solomon's wisdom to Torah wisdom and recast Solomon in their own model. Divine inspiration plays a role in the rabbinic understanding of Solomon. On the one hand, it offers a justification for his actions. On the other, it poses challenges. Solomon receives divine inspiration, but he still sins. Throughout these midrashim, the rabbis are engaging with the Solomon of Kings, not the idealized Solomon of Chronicles who requires no justification. As for the development of exegesis, rabbinic evaluations of Solomon's wisdom evince a general distrust of non-rabbinic wisdom as well as a general willingness on the part of the rabbis of late antiquity to recast biblical figures in their own image. We also see examples of rabbinic rejection of esotericism, either in polemic response to pagan and Christian tendencies or out of concern for preserving rabbinic authority. These themes will recur in other rabbinic treatments of Solomon.

Debates over Whether Solomon Sinned

In our discussion of the Solomon narrative in Kings, we have discussed the clarity with which the biblical text indicates Solomon's sins. Any apologetic treatment of Solomon's sins needs to contend with this text. Therefore it bears repeated scrutiny. 1 Kings 11 could not be more clear in its assessment that Solomon sinned:

4. And it was in the time of Solomon's old age, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not whole with the Lord his God as was the heart of David his father. 5. And Solomon went after Ashtoret, the gods of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. 6. And Solomon did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, and he did not fulfill [his obligation] to the Lord like David his father. 7. Then Solomon built a high place to Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, on a mountain facing Jerusalem, and to Molekh, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 8. And so he did for all of his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrifices to their gods (1 Kg. 11:4-8).

This excerpt sets out a fairly straight progression of sin, from Solomon's heart turning, to going after other gods, to building shrines and high places for them. As we have discussed in chapter two, verse 11:8 allows for the possibility that Solomon built shrines, but only his wives worshipped at them. However, the prophet Ahijah later tells Jeroboam that the kingdom is being split because the people, seemingly including Solomon, abandoned God and bowed to other Gods (1 Kg. 11:33).⁵⁰⁸ We also noted how that verse is rendered in the plural: "they abandoned Me, and they bowed..., and they did not walk in My ways... like David his father." The reference to "David his father" indicates that the verse is talking about Solomon, but the use of the plural seems to implicate a larger population, again allowing for the possibility that Solomon himself was not guilty of idolatry but did sin by allowing others to worship foreign gods.

Whether one renders Solomon's participation in idolatry as direct participation or mere facilitation, there is no arguing with the contention that his conduct was sinful. Furthermore, even if Solomon did not commit idolatry, he certainly violated the three kingly prohibitions enumerated in Deuteronomy 17.⁵⁰⁹ Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence against Solomon, Rabbi Samuel bar Naḥmani can still state, "Anyone who says that Solomon sinned is wrong" (*b. Shabbat 56b*).

R. Samuel bar Naḥmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Anyone who says that Solomon sinned is wrong. As it says, "And his heart was not whole with the Lord his God as the heart of David, his father" [1 Kg. 11:4]. He was not like the heart of David his father, but also he surely did not sin. However, how do I uphold "And it was during Solomon's old age, his wives turned his heart" [Ibid.]? This is according to Rabbi Nathan.... This is what it says: "And it was during Solomon's old age, his wives turned his heart" to go

⁵⁰⁸ Sasson, *מלך ודדיט*, 121-122.

⁵⁰⁹ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 155.

“after other gods,” but he did not go. But is it not written: “Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab” [1 Kg. 11:7]? That he sought to build but did not build. ...But is it not written: “And Solomon did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord” [1 Kg. 11:6]? Rather, because he should have protested against his wives but did not protest, Scripture holds him accountable as if he sinned (*b. Shabbat 56b*).

In an effort to justify Rabbi Samuel bar Nahmani’s statement, the Talmud argues that while Solomon’s wives turned his heart toward other gods, he did not actually follow. This explanation seems to fly in the face of 1 Kings 11:5, which states that he did go after foreign gods. Rather than respond to this problem, the talmudic discussion essentially omits this verse.⁵¹⁰

The discussion in *b. Shabbat 56b* continues with additional apologetics. With reference to verse 11:7, the Talmud argues that Solomon *thought* to build an altar, but in reality he never built it. This argument rests on the fact that the word “built” in verse 7 is actually rendered in the future tense, יבנה. Ultimately, however, the contention that Solomon was free of sin is essentially abandoned, most likely because it is untenable. The best the Talmud can say is that Solomon may not have directly participated in idolatry, but he failed to protest his wives’ idolatrous worship, causing the text to treat him as though he had participated in worshipping foreign gods himself. Even this conclusion runs afoul of the plain meaning of the text in 1 Kings 11. Gilad Sasson notes that there is no rabbinic source that unequivocally states that Solomon actually committed idolatry. The closest the rabbinic literature comes to doing so is in discussions seeking to deny Solomon any portion in the world to come, which we will discuss later in this

⁵¹⁰ Sasson, מלך ומדייט, 122-124.

chapter. Yet even these discussions never specify the basis for Solomon's potential punishment.⁵¹¹

Sasson notes a general willingness on the part of the rabbis to criticize Solomon for violating the three kingly prohibitions and for his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh. They are far more uneasy when it comes to the prospect of Solomon's idolatry. Sasson suggests that for both rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia, there was tremendous discomfort associating Solomon with idolatry. In Babylonia, the prevailing Persian culture was essentially pagan. This was equally true for much of the rabbinic period in Hellenistic Palestine. The rabbis had to contend with the argument that there must be some merit to paganism if the wisest man who ever lived ultimately turned to pagan worship. Thus, argues Sasson, the rabbis minimized Solomon's personal connection to idolatry to disarm the pagan contention that Solomon ultimately embraced it. Furthermore, the rabbis were probably disturbed by the notion that Solomon was not directly punished in his lifetime for his idolatry. In rabbinic thought, idolatry is a capital offense punishable by stoning, yet Solomon was not punished. Thus, they concluded that he could not have actually worshipped foreign gods.⁵¹²

While the rabbis may have been moved by these cultural and halakhic considerations, their impulse to distance Solomon from direct participation in idolatry may also have stemmed from their understanding of his authorship of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Since the rabbis ultimately establish that Solomon wrote these books through divine inspiration, it became all the more difficult for them to entertain the possibility that Solomon could have turned from God and worshipped idols. One might think that Solomon's role as Temple builder

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 124-125.

⁵¹² Ibid., 125-127.

would inure him from the taint of idolatry. However, as we will see in the next section, this achievement also faces rabbinic scrutiny. Furthermore, while the midrashic questioning of whether Solomon ever sinned reveals a rabbinic impulse to defend biblical figures from the faults attributed to them by Scripture, the multitude of responses demonstrates the rabbinic willingness not only to criticize biblical figures but a general comfort with the coexistence of conflicting opinions. While this may seem fairly obvious, especially given the nature of the Talmudic endeavor, which is fueled by conflicting opinions, midrashic exegesis, unlike halakhah, does not rely on disagreement to arrive at its greater truths. Thus, the preservation of disparate views exhibits the rabbinic willingness to embrace multiple and even contradictory approaches to scriptural understanding.

Solomon and Fate of the Temple

In Kings, and even more so in Chronicles, Solomon's crowning achievement is the building of the Temple. Many rabbinic sources echo and even amplify this idea. For instance, *Seder Olam* 15 juxtaposes the completion of Solomon's Temple with the completion of Moses' Tabernacle and the revelation at Sinai, all three being revelatory moments witnessed by the entire people. *Pesikta Rabbati* 6 juxtaposes the building of the Temple with God's creation of the world. Several midrashim imbue the construction, completion, and operation of the Temple with miraculous elements, such as the *shamir* worm that cuts stones (*t. Sotah* 15:1; *y. Sotah* 9:13; *b. Sotah* 48b; *Mid. Teh.* 78 (11)), the cessation of flooding upon the dedication (*Tanh. Noah* 11), and golden trees that flower and give fruit according to the seasons (*y. Yoma* 4:4; *b. Yoma* 21b; *Song Rab.* 3:9[3]). These miracles act as a sign of God's support and approval of Solomon's Temple building endeavor.⁵¹³

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 69-77.

However, not all of the rabbinic sources are so unequivocally positive. A popular line of midrashic tradition reports that Solomon is unable to open the gates of the Temple to accommodate the Ark of the Covenant. Solomon recites petitions and prayers to no avail. When he invokes David (2 Chr. 6:42), the gates open (*Ex. Rab.* 8:1; *Num. Rab.* 14:3; *Tanh. Va'Era* 7). In other versions, the gates will not open until Solomon invokes God's mastery over the world in Psalm 24 (*Ex. Rab.* 8:1; *Num. Rab.* 15:13; *Tanh. Beha'alotecha* 9; *Mid. Teh.* 24[10]). Sasson notes that these midrashim knowingly alter the sequence of events as they are presented in Kings and Chronicles to shift the narrative. One set focuses the Temple's dedication on David, with the gates opening for his merit, not Solomon's. The other sees Solomon's efforts to open the gates fail in his arrogance until he can acknowledge God's supremacy. The Babylonian Talmud moderates the critical tone of this tradition by rendering the opening of the gates as a sign that God forgave David for his sins (*b. Shabbat* 30a; *b. Moed Katan* 9a; *b. Sanhedrin* 107b). With the exception of the Babylonian Talmud, the other sources seek to criticize Solomon at the moment of his greatest triumph.⁵¹⁴

Even more dramatic is the line of midrashim that relocate Solomon's dedication of the Temple to the same day as his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh (*Lev. Rab.* 12:5; *Num. Rab.* 10:4; *Mid. Mishlei* 31:4). This rabbinic tradition finds its scriptural basis in the juxtaposition of Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh with the concern that the Temple had not yet been built (1 Kg. 3:1-2).⁵¹⁵ Once again, this marks a deliberate reordering of the chronology presented in Kings. In Kings, Solomon marries the daughter of Pharaoh in chapter 3 but does not dedicate the Temple until chapter 9. This particular line of midrashic tradition views

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 83-89.

⁵¹⁵ Barzilai, "ההקדמה למלכות שלמה (מלכ"א, ג)," 74.

Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter as particularly sinful.⁵¹⁶ The details of this tradition merit closer examination:

Rabbi Ishmael said: On the same night that Solomon completed the labor of the Temple, he married Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh. And there was there rejoicing celebrating the Temple, and rejoicing over the daughter of Pharaoh. And the rejoicing celebrating the daughter of Pharaoh surpassed the rejoicing of the Temple.... And in that moment, it occurred to the Holy One blessed is He to destroy Jerusalem.... Our rabbis said: The daughter of Pharaoh brought in for him a thousand types of musical instruments and they were commanded to play before him that night. And she would say to him: This is what they play for such-and-such pagan worship, and this is what they play for such-and-such pagan worship. What did the daughter of Pharaoh do? She spread a type of sheet for him above him and set in it all types of precious stones and pearls, which would shine like stars and constellations. And each time Solomon wanted to get up, he would see these stars and the constellations, and he slept until the fourth hour [after dawn]. Rabbi Levi said: On that day, the daily offering was offered in the fourth hour.... And Israel were saddened that it was the day of the dedication of the Temple, and they were unable to make [the morning offering] because Solomon was sleeping. And they were afraid to wake him out of dread of the crown. They went and informed Bathsheba, his mother, and she went and woke him and chastised him (*Num. Rab.* 10:4).

This midrash not only connects Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh with the dedication of the Temple, but also with its ultimate destruction. Solomon values his wedding over the Temple. His preference renders the Temple meaningless and thus seals its fate. In this way, the rabbis reduce the significance of Solomon's crowning achievement, the building of the Temple.⁵¹⁷ The first part of the midrash blames the Temple's destruction on a poor choice of priorities. This midrash follows the underlying criticism in Kings that Solomon spent more time

⁵¹⁶ Sasson, *מלך ודודיט*, 95-96.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-96, 103.

building his own palace than on the Temple. The second part of the excerpt above continues the theme of Solomon's neglect of the Temple – he oversleeps on its inaugural day preventing the daily worship. However, it amplifies Solomon's sinfulness by inserting idolatry into the story. Solomon's neglect is not mere laziness or indulgence. His foreign wife has turned his heart! However, the rabbis are careful not to impute idolatry directly to Solomon. The daughter of Pharaoh merely gives him a tour. The ersatz stars in her canopy are also suggestive of pagan worship since the text refers to paganism as עבודת כוכבים, literally "the worship of stars." Here Solomon is deluded by these stars, but he does not actually worship them.

Interestingly, the building of the Temple occurs roughly at the mid-point of biblical history. The line of midrash we have just examined juxtaposes the high point of Israelite history, the fulfillment of God's promises, with Israel's undoing.⁵¹⁸ However, this assessment stands in sharp contrast with the midrash of *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26:

Another thing: "This month will be for you." ...Before the Holy One blessed is He removed Israel from Egypt, He informed them through hints that the monarchy would be theirs for only thirty generations. On the first of Nissan, the moon begins to shine, and it progressively shines more until the fifteenth day, when its disk becomes full. And from the fifteenth until the thirtieth, its light diminishes, until on the thirtieth it is no longer seen. So too it is with Israel. There were fifteen generations from Abraham until Solomon. Abraham began to shine.... Isaac came, and he too shone.... Jacob came, and he added light.... And after that, Judah, Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David. When Solomon arrived, the disk of the moon became full, as it says, "And Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord as king" [1 Chr. 29:23]. And is it possible for a human to sit on the throne of the Holy One blessed is He, about Whom it is said, "His throne is of tongues of flame."? Rather, just as the Holy One blessed is He rules from one end of the world to the other and rules over all the kings,

⁵¹⁸ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 108-109.

...so too that [reign] of Solomon was from one end of the earth to the other, as it says, “And all of the kings of the earth sought Solomon’s presence, etc.” [2 Chr. 9:23], and they each brought his own gift. Therefore, it is said, “And Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king.” The raiment of the Holy One blessed is He is glory and splendor, and He gave to Solomon the glory of kingship, as it says, “And He placed upon him the glory of kingship” [1 Chr. 29:25]. With regard to the throne of the Holy One blessed is He, it is written, “The appearance of their faces were the faces of a human and the faces of a lion.” And with regard to Solomon, it is written, “And upon the insets that were within the frames were lions, cattle” [1 Kg. 7:29]. And a writing states, “Like the structure of the chariot” [1 Kg. 7:33]. Nothing evil touches the throne of the Holy One blessed is He, as it says, “Evil will not abide with You.” And with regard to Solomon, it is written, “There is no adversary, and there is no evil catastrophe” [1 Kg. 5:18]. The Holy One blessed is He made six heavens and sits in the seventh. And with regard to the throne of Solomon, it is written, “There were six levels to the throne” [1 Kg. 10:19], and he sat on the seventh level. Thus, the disk of the moon had become full, and from that point, the kings began to progressively diminish: “And the son of Solomon was Rehoboam” [1 Chr. 3:10-15]. And the son of Rehoboam was Abijah, and his son was Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoiaquim. And when Zedekiah arrived, as it is written, “And the eyes of Zedekiah were blinded,” the light of the moon was missing. And all those years, even though Israel was sinning, the fathers were praying for them and making peace between Israel and the Omnipresent.... And until when did the fathers pray for them? Until Zedekiah lost his eyes and the Temple was destroyed, as it says “And peace will multiply until there is no more moon,” until the thirtieth generation that Israel held the kingship. From that time until now, who makes peace for Israel? The Lord, as it says, “May the Lord raise His face to you and grant you peace” (*Ex. Rab. 15:26*).⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁹ For the sake of brevity, I have omitted some of the biblical prooftexts. I have retained those prooftexts that further the understanding of the midrash. I have also excluded the citations for most of the prooftexts with the exception of those taken from Kings and Chronicles. Parallel texts exist in *Pesikta deRav Kahana* 4, פרה אדומה [3] and *Pesikta Rabbati* 15, in which Solomon is the culmination of ten generations, while the next ten generations decline in greatness.

This midrash, too, notes that Solomon stood at the midpoint of Israelite history from Abraham until the Babylonian exile. However, *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26 does not juxtapose Solomon's crowning achievement with the advent of idolatry in the Israelite kingdom and the ultimate destruction of the Temple. Rather, it earnestly casts Solomon as the highpoint of Israelite history. Furthermore, it unapologetically depicts Solomon as the next best thing to God Himself, seating him on God's throne and dressing him in God's raiment.⁵²⁰ *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26 does not engage in apologetics, because it sees no cause for apology. Like Chronicles, which the midrash cites frequently, it is aware of the Solomon of Kings, as it cites Kings as well, but simply omits any disparaging or problematic material from Kings. Rather, the descent from Israelite glory begins with Rehoboam. The Solomon of this particular midrash is like the Solomon of Chronicles, a whitewashed ideal. In this way, *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26 is a rarity, standing apart from other midrashim in its literally glowing depiction of Solomon.⁵²¹ *Exodus Rabbah*'s later compilation date may explain its more positive view of Solomon, as increasingly apologetic views of biblical figures, especially Solomon, become dominant in the geonic period and during the Middle Ages. Some of this later apologetics may come in response to both Christian and Islamic lionization of Solomon. We will discuss this concept at greater length in our treatment of the Targumic literature on Solomon.

Another midrashic tradition connects Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh not with the destruction of the first Temple but with the destruction of the *second* Temple. In this tradition, the rabbis describe that on the day that Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh, an

⁵²⁰ *Tanhuma Yitro* 10 offers a similar if less hyperbolic evaluation of Solomon. This midrash delineates numerous groups of threes, with the third always being the most beloved. Of Saul, David, and Solomon, Solomon is the most beloved because he was allowed to sit on throne of God.

⁵²¹ Oddly, I found no discussion of this particular midrash in any of the research I conducted on rabbinic attitudes toward Solomon.

angel descended and planted a reed in the sea. Sand gathered around it, ultimately forming the land upon which the city of Rome would be built. (y. *Avodah Zara* 1:2; b. *Shabbat* 56b; b. *Sanhedrin* 21b; *Song Rab.* 1:6 [4]). The mention of Rome alludes to the ultimate destruction of the second Temple by the Romans.⁵²² This connection between Solomon and the second Temple is counter-intuitive. Solomon built the first Temple, not the second Temple. Historically, he has no connection to the second Temple, much less to its destruction. Rather, this tradition views the ultimate downfall of Israel beginning with Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh. From this perspective, rabbinic sources that are critical of Solomon make no effort to differentiate between the Solomon of the Golden Age and the Solomon who fails in old age. It makes little sense to the rabbis that the man who would ultimately serve idols would ever have truly loved God wholeheartedly. Instead, these sources view Solomon as failed from the start. His downfall and the decline of Israel begin early in his reign, with his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh.⁵²³

The midrashim about Solomon's role in the destruction of the two Temples follow a theme laid out in Kings. Solomon is the first of the Israelite kings to commit idolatry. But the theme of kings abandoning the God of Israel for foreign gods recurs throughout the rest of Kings, ultimately leading to exile and the destruction of the Temple. Thus, the Solomonic narrative is a tragedy. It sets the tone for the remainder of the Deuteronomist History, with

⁵²² Cf. Paul Rieger, "The Foundation of Rome in the Talmud: A Contribution to the Folklore of Antiquity," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 16, no. 3 (Jan. 1926): 227-230. Rieger notes that this tradition parallels Hellenistic legends of gods founding cities where a staff has been placed. Rieger argues that the reference to Rome does not necessarily refer to the Rome in Italy and the center of the Roman Empire. It can be understood as a reference to Tyre, Palaetyrus, or Bavlou.

⁵²³ Sasson, *שבעה עשר*, 100, 102-3.

disastrous historic consequences for Israel.⁵²⁴ With the extraordinary exception of *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26 and its ilk, the midrashim blaming Solomon for the destruction of his Temple as well as the second Temple are highly critical of Solomon. Gone is any talk of divine inspiration. Rather, these midrashim interact with the nuanced, problematic, and failed Solomon of the Book of Kings, and they read the Solomon of Kings as flawed from the start. Where *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26 sees Solomon as the apex of Israelite perfection, the midrashim blaming Solomon for the destruction of the Temples see his sins as the ultimate cause of Israel's decline and ruin.

The difference between these traditions may revolve around varying rabbinic attitudes toward the Temple. The second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, meaning it was absent for the majority of the rabbinic movement of late antiquity. Some rabbis may have idealized the lost Temple as God's dwelling on earth. *Pesikta Rabbati* 6 claims that God's creation of the world was not complete until the day Solomon finished construction of the Temple, the name שלמה, Solomon, alluding to the world's completion, שלמות. The building of the Temple is the crowning of creation, making Solomon a partner with God in perfecting the world. Others, however, remembering the corruption of the Hasmoneans and the Temple's role in sectarian violence leading up to its destruction by Rome, may have seen it as less than perfect. Furthermore, the rabbinic reading of Solomon in Kings may have evoked memories of Herod, an evil king who built a beautiful Temple for God. The rabbis of late antiquity were not fond of Herod, but they had to admit that he built a spectacular Temple (*b. Sukkah* 51b; *b. Bava Batra* 4a). As such, the rabbis were easily able to distinguish between the sanctity of a building and its builder. It is true that much of rabbinic literature is dedicated to Temple ritual despite its destruction. Its return is viewed in terms of a messianic ideal. However, on a practical level, much of rabbinic literature

⁵²⁴ Viviano, "Glory Lost," 345, 347.

is more skeptical about the Temple as the central feature of Jewish religion. Having had to reconfigure Judaism around the Torah, the home, and the synagogue, rabbinic literature often tempers the Temple's role in the Jewish consciousness. As a result, Solomon's achievement of building the Temple carries less value for the rabbis than it did for the author of Chronicles.

Furthermore, rabbinic attitudes toward the first Temple may have been tempered by the very fact that Solomon built it. Solomon's problematic character calls the greatness of his primary achievement into question. This attitude is reflected in a recurring line of tradition which compares Solomon's Temple and its accessories unfavorably to Moses' tabernacle. This tradition goes back to tannaitic times as the Tosefta reports that Solomon made ten tables and ten candelabras for his Temple, but the only the table and candelabra made by Moses were actually used for Temple service (*t. Menahot* 11:9-10).⁵²⁵ The Palestinian Talmud amplifies this tradition by contrasting the ways in which Solomon and Moses crafted their appurtenances. Solomon had to refine 1,000 talents of gold to get 1 talent pure enough for the candelabra, whereas Moses had a leftover gold dinar from his candelabra, which he threw into furnace 80 times without losing any material (*y. Shekalim* 6:3). The implication is that Moses, who constructs the tabernacle at God's command and for Israel's ability to atone, is aided by God's miraculous grace. Moses and God are partners in the construction of the tabernacle. Solomon, however, builds his Temple on his own initiative and for his own glory, expending untold resources to erect a grandiose edifice. As a result, he lacks the divine aid enjoyed by Moses. It is little wonder, therefore, that this attitude would reflect Solomon as the cause of the Temple's destruction rather than the apex of Israelite history. This line of rabbinic tradition exhibits a surprising attitude toward the Temple, which is normally thought to be the subject of unwavering rabbinic reverence. The rabbinic

⁵²⁵ Similarly, Moses' altar is more beloved than Solomon's (*Tanh. Terumah* 11).

willingness to criticize Solomon's Temple alters this perception. While the rabbinic willingness to criticize the Temple may merely reflect criticism of Solomon, it still reveals a rabbinic recognition that even the Temple is not beyond critical treatment.

Solomon's Portion in the World to Come

Another recurring tradition involves rabbinic attempts to deny Solomon his portion in the world to come (y. *Sanhedrin* 10:2; b. *Sanhedrin* 104b; *Num. Rab.* 14:1; *Song Rab.* 1:5; *Pes. Rab.* 6; *Tanh. Metzora* 1). For example, the Talmud in b. *Sanhedrin* 104b interrupts its discussion of which kings and commoners have no portion in the world to come to consider adding another name to the short list:

Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: [The Men of the Great Assembly] sought to count one more. The image of the likeness of his father came and bowed before them, but they did not pay attention to it. Fire came from heaven, and flames licked their benches, but they did not pay attention to it. A heavenly voice came out and said to them: "See the man who is diligent in his labor; he will stand before kings; he will not stand before dark ones" [Prov. 29:22]. He who [built] My house before his house, and not only that, but he built My house in seven years and built his house in thirteen years, "will stand before kings; [he won't stand] before dark ones." But they did not pay attention to it. A heavenly voice went out and said: "Will I repay him from you? For you have despised [him] that you should choose and not I, etc." [Job 34:33]. (b. *Sanhedrin* 104b).

Ultimately, for most of these midrashim including b. *Sanhedrin* 104b, the attempts to deny Solomon his portion in the world to come fail on jurisdictional grounds, not on the merits.

Neither the Men of the Great Assembly nor the sages have the authority to determine who is granted or denied his heavenly reward. That power rests solely within divine discretion. Thus, this tradition can be read as circumscribing the judicial province of the rabbis to matters of this

world.⁵²⁶ At the same time, although these midrashim offer arguments to mitigate Solomon's fate, none of these arguments proves compelling on the merits. The appearance of David's image or spirit is an appeal to find mercy for the son based on the merits of the father. David's appearance does not bear on Solomon's merits. Fire from heaven expresses divine disapproval, but it offers no explanation for that disapproval. The intervention of a heavenly voice, in and of itself, suggests that God Himself weighs in on the controversy. In rabbinic literature, heavenly voices function as representatives of God's voice or opinion injected into human matters. However, despite their representation of divine will, the rabbis do not always feel compelled to heed these voices. The fact that the heavenly voice is always depicted as an attenuated manifestation of God's will that appears independently of God's presence or even an angel seems to create the space in which the rabbis can take God's will under advisement but ultimately make their own decisions regardless.⁵²⁷ The heavenly voice's argument is the only substantive defense on his behalf. However, Solomon's purported diligence in building the Temple is hardly convincing since Solomon inexplicably delayed the dedication of the Temple and because his spending more time on his palace facially implies he cared more about it. None of these arguments is dispositive or alters Solomon's fate for the better. It is only the procedural argument that prevails.

⁵²⁶ Sasson, מלך ודגויט, 118-120.

⁵²⁷ This attenuation is furthered by the Hebrew term for the heavenly voice, the בַּת קוֹל, or literally the daughter of a voice. Thus, the heavenly voice is not the actual voice of God but rather the byproduct of God's voice. Perhaps the best known rabbinic rejection of a heavenly voice occurs within the story of the Oven of Akhnai, in which the rabbis reject a heavenly voice pronouncing the halakhic correctness of Rabbi Eliezer in favor of the majority position. The heavenly voice is effectively silenced by the resounding jurisprudential conclusion that control of the halakhic process "is not in heaven" (*b. Bava Metzia* 59a-59b). In the case of the heavenly voice in *b. Sanhedrin* 104b, the rabbis reject its substantive argument but accept its procedural argument.

It is noteworthy that *b. Sanhedrin* 104b never mentions Solomon by name. The discussion of building God's house makes the subject of discussion obvious, yet his name remains hidden as if to protect his identity. Thus, despite the severity of the debate, there is an attempt to protect Solomon's dignity. This move may reflect the ultimate outcome of the discussion. Since in the end Solomon is not barred from entering the world to come, there is no need to sully his name. Similarly, the talmudic discussion never articulates Solomon's sin that makes the Men of the Great Assembly consider him for exclusion. This omission may also serve to preserve Solomon's dignity. It may also reflect the rabbinic discomfort with directly discussing Solomon's idolatry. The fact that the sin remains unspecified may allude to the fact that the sin the rabbis are considering is, in fact, idol worship. This stands in consonance with the severity of the punishment, exclusion from the world to come.

Furthermore, the other names on the list of kings considered for exclusion from the world to come, Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh, are all kings who embraced and encouraged idolatry. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Solomon's grievous sin was also idolatry. Unlike the Talmud, the later midrashim are more willing to identify Solomon's decisive sin, confirming that his critical sin was that of idolatry. *Pesikta Rabbati* 6 specifies that Solomon's wives turned his heart toward idolatry. *Tanhuma Metzora* 1 similarly bases the attempt to exclude Solomon on his marriages to foreign women and his doing evil in the eyes of God. *Pesikta Rabbati* 6, rather than ignoring the substantive reasons for Solomon's claim to his portion in the world to come, embraces the argument that Solomon's devotion and dedication to building the Temple requires his inclusion with the righteous kings.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ Sasson, מלך ומדינת, 120.

What is most surprising about this line of midrashic tradition is that the rabbis are willing to entertain the idea of excluding Solomon from the world to come at all. The rabbinic concept of the world to come functions as a response to the theodicy. Since evil is not always punished in this world, and the righteous sometimes seem to suffer despite their piety, rabbinic thought resolves this seeming injustice with the promise of judgment, reward, and punishment after death.⁵²⁹ In this particular case, what motivates the rabbis to consider Solomon's portion in the world to come is the fact that he does not seem to receive a punishment commensurate with the severity of his sins. Yes, the kingdom is split, but this event does not take place in Solomon's lifetime. If anything, Solomon himself seems to bear few direct consequences of his misdeeds. This fact leads the rabbis to contemplate the possibility that Solomon's real punishment is meted out to him following his death rather than during his lifetime. Thus, the contemplation of Solomon's loss of his portion in the world to come is not without scriptural basis within the rabbinic mindset. The rabbis are fully cognizant that they, as human beings, do not have the authority to make decisions about the fate of anyone's soul. In fact, they ultimately conclude their longer discussion in *Sanhedrin* without excluding anyone, even the most terrible kings, from the world to come. As such, the discussion of who has no share in the hereafter functions as a cerebral exercise in determining who are the very worst of Tanakh's actors. The fact that they can consider Solomon in this category and reject all substantive arguments to the contrary is harsh criticism of the highest order. This line of tradition probably represents the rabbis' most direct confrontation of Solomon's idolatry. Even if they fail to state unequivocally that Solomon was a direct participant in worshipping other gods, the nature of the discussion implies this

⁵²⁹ For further discussion of this theological development, see Candice Levy, *Arbiters of the Afterlife: Olam Haba, Torah and Rabbinic Authority* (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 2013), 174-177.

conclusion. As such, this tradition echoes the critical conclusion of 1 Kings 11, viewing Solomon as a failed king who betrays God in the worst imaginable way. The severity of this discussion reveals that the rabbis do not consider such strong criticism out of bounds. However, the rabbinic refusal to name names and deeds reveals a self-conscious discomfort with their evaluation. Hence, while the rabbis are willing to engage with the text and take it to its logical conclusion, a sense of reverence for revered biblical figures prevails, inuring those figures from complete condemnation.

Loss of the Throne and Ashmedai

Several midrashim report that Solomon was deposed from his throne. This line of midrash becomes so prominent that there is even an unrelated midrash set during the period of Solomon's exile from the throne.⁵³⁰ Despite the popularity of this legend, there is no scriptural basis in either Kings or Chronicles for the tradition that Solomon loses his throne during his lifetime. If anything, the idea runs directly contrary to God's assurance to Solomon that although God will tear the kingdom from him, it will not happen during Solomon's lifetime (1 Kg. 11:11-12). The only potential scriptural basis for this legend stems from Ecclesiastes 1:12: "I am Qohelet; I *was* king over Israel in Jerusalem." The use of the past tense suggests that Qohelet, whom the rabbis identify as Solomon, ceased to be king at some point during his lifetime and lived to write about it.

⁵³⁰ *Midrash Mishlei* 15:17 describes how two different men who recognize Solomon in his fallen state attempt to console him. The first, a wealthy man, reminds him of his kingly glory, causing Solomon immense pain. The other, a poor man, reassures Solomon of God's unending love, comforting Solomon. The homiletic message extends beyond how best to comfort the fallen but acts as a reassurance to exiled Israel that God will never abandon His love for them. Despite Solomon's central role in this midrash, he is not really the subject. The midrash offers no exegetical reflection on Solomon or his sins. He is merely a tool for unrelated homiletic purposes. However, it is relevant to our purposes to the extent that it takes place within Solomon's exile from the throne and presumes the audience's familiarity with the midrashic tradition that Solomon spent such a period in exile.

In our discussion of the rabbinic evaluation of Solomon's wisdom, we saw how the rabbis pilloried Solomon for thinking that he could outsmart the Torah and violate its precepts while avoiding the consequences of his transgression. If Solomon's great sin was his pride in his wisdom, his assuredness that he could violate the letter of the law without violating its spirit, then the proper punishment for such a sin, in the rabbinic mind, would be humiliation.⁵³¹ Thus, the rabbis, through the magic of midrashic literature, cause Solomon to lose his throne. In some of the legends, the loss of power is gradual, slowly reduced over time from ruling heaven and earth, to ruling all of Israel, to ruling just Jerusalem, to ultimately ruling nothing but his most personal possessions (*b. Sanhedrin* 20b; *Song Rab.* 1:10).⁵³² In other midrashim, the loss of power is much more sudden. And while the tradition that Solomon loses his throne in his lifetime seems to gain general acceptance in rabbinic literature, whether Solomon ever regains the throne is more hotly debated (*b. Sanhedrin* 20b; *Song Rab.* 1:10). This same debate appears repeatedly in the rabbinic literature regarding whether Solomon was a king and then a commoner or whether he ever became a king again (*b. Gittin* 68b; *Song Rab.* 1:10; *Mid. Qoh.* 1:1 [12]). This debate may reflect the fact that the Solomon of Kings never responds to God's punishment, never expresses contrition, and never repents. Thus, the debate revolves around whether Solomon remained unrepentant or eventually atoned despite the failure of Tanakh to record such an event. This debate also touches on whether Solomon is to be seen as good or bad in the final analysis.

A number of texts simply have Solomon replaced on the throne by an angel (*y. Sanhedrin* 2:6; *Ruth Rab.* 5:6 [14]; *Mid. Qoh.* 2:2 [3]; *PRK* 26; *Tanh. Aharei Mot* 1). Other texts refer to

⁵³¹ Rabbinic sensibilities require divine punishment be meted out "measure for measure." See e.g. *b. Sanhedrin* 90a.

⁵³² Sasson, מלך ומדייט, 112-114.

the more elaborate legend that Solomon is deposed and replaced by a demon named Ashmedai.⁵³³ Palestinian sources, although familiar with demonology, tend to downplay the role of demons. Babylonian sources, on the other hand, discuss demons with far greater frequency. As a result, the Ashmedai legend appears primarily in Babylonian sources.⁵³⁴ This probably reflects the larger role demons and magic played in folk beliefs in the Zoroastrian culture of the Persian Empire.⁵³⁵ The Babylonian association of Solomon with demons functions as criticism of Solomon for caring more about demonology than Torah wisdom.⁵³⁶ The Ashmedai legend may predate its appearance in either Talmud.⁵³⁷ The earliest literary mention of the demon Asmodeus appears in the apocryphal work, *The Book of Tobit* (*Tobit* 3:8, 3:17).⁵³⁸ Sasson traces major elements of the Talmud's Ashmedai tale to the *Testament of Solomon*.⁵³⁹ The Ashmedai legend situates Solomon's composition of Ecclesiastes during a period of dethronement.⁵⁴⁰ The fullest and most elaborate version of the Jewish Ashmedai legend appears in the Babylonian Talmud in *b. Gittin* 68a-68b. The story lacks attribution and reflects a number of other traditions that contribute to it. It also reflects traditions regarding Solomon's mastery over the natural

⁵³³ Ashmedai is also referred to as Asmodeus whom we have already encountered in Second Temple and early Christian literature.

⁵³⁴ Sandra Shimoff, "Rabbinic Legends of Saul, Solomon, and David: Political and Social Implications of Aggada" (PhD dissertation, St. Mary's Seminary and University, 1981), 296.

⁵³⁵ Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests*, 127.

⁵³⁶ Richard Kalmin, *Migrating Tales: The Talmud's Narratives and Their Historic Context* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 115-116.

⁵³⁷ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 91.

⁵³⁸ Busch, "Solomon as a True Exorcist," 189; *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: NRSV*, 1373, fn. to 3:8.

⁵³⁹ Sasson, *שולמון ודמונים*, 149-151.

⁵⁴⁰ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 92.

world, including his mastery over demons. The story begins with Solomon's efforts to find the *shamir* worm to build the Temple.⁵⁴¹

For what purpose did he [Solomon] need male and female demons? As it is written: "And the House when it was built was built of whole quarried stone" [1 Kg. 6:7]. He [Solomon] said to the Rabbis: How should I do this? They said to him: There is the *shamir* that Moses brought for the stones of the ephod. He said to them: Where is it found? They said to him: Bring a male and female demon and apply pressure to them. They may know and will reveal it to you. He brought a male and female demon and applied pressure to them. They said: We don't know. Perhaps Ashmedai, king of the demons, knows. He said to them: Where is he? They said to him: He is on such-and-such a mountain. He has dug himself a pit and filled it with water, and has covered it with a stone and sealed it with his signet. And every day, he goes up to the heavens and learns in the heavenly academy and descends to earth and studies in the earthly academy. And he comes and examines his seal, and he uncovers it and drinks, and covers it, and seals it, and leaves. He [Solomon] sent Benaiah ben Yehoyada. He gave him a chain on which was engraved the Name [of God], and a ring on which was engraved the Name, and balls of wool, and skins of wine. He [Benaiah] went. He dug a pit below [Ashmedai's] and siphoned off the water, and plugged it with the balls of wool. And he dug a pit above and poured wine into it. And he hid them. He went up and sat in a tree. When he [Ashmedai] came, he examined his seal, uncovered it, and found wine. He said: It is written (Prov. 20:1) "Wine leads to mockery and liquor to madness, and everyone who errs with it will not become wise." And it is written (Hos. 4:11): "'Perversion, wine, and fresh wine will take a heart.'" He did not drink. When he became thirsty, he could not overcome it. He drank, became intoxicated, and fell asleep. He [Benaiah] descended and came. He threw the chain on him and sealed it. When he awoke he started twisting. He [Benaiah] said to him: The Name of your Master is upon you! The Name of your Master is upon you! When he was taking him along, they arrived at a date palm. He

⁵⁴¹ Sasson, *שם השמי*, 141-142. The *shamir* is a worm that can chew through solid stone. This midrashic legend emerges in order to explain how the stones that form the ramp to the Altar could be carved from rock that was not cut with metal tools, as required by Exodus 20:22.

[Ashmedai] brushed against it and knocked it down. They arrived at a house, and he knocked it down. They arrived at the hut of a certain widow. She came out and appealed to him. He bent his body from it and broke a bone. He said: This is what is written (Prov. 25:15): “And a soft tongue will break a bone.” He saw a blind man who was reeling on the road. He brought him back to his path. He saw a drunkard who was reeling on the road. He brought him back to his path. He saw a wedding party that they were enjoying. He cried. He heard a certain man who was saying to a shoemaker: Make me shoes [that will last] for seven years. He laughed. He saw a magician doing sorcery. He laughed. When they arrived there, they did not bring him before Solomon for three days. On the first day, he said to them: Why has the king not requested that I [be brought] before him? They said to him: He has been overcome by drink. He took a brick and placed it on another. They came and told Solomon. He said to them: This is what he was saying to you: Let him drink again. The next day he said to them: Why has the king not requested that I [be brought] before him? They said to him: He has been overcome with food. He took the brick from atop the other and put it on the ground. They came and told Solomon. He said to them: This is what he was telling you: Withhold his food from him. At the end of three days, he was brought before him. He [Ashmedai] took a reed, measured off four *amot* and threw it before him [Solomon]. He said to him: Now, when a man dies he has nothing in this world except four *amot*. Now that you have conquered the whole world, you were not satisfied until you conquered me too? He said to him: I do not ask anything of you, except that I am building the Temple, and I need the *shamir*. He said to him: It is not entrusted to me. It is entrusted to the ministering angel of the sea, and he gives it only to a wild rooster, whom he trusts [according to] its oath. And what does he do with it? He carries it to an uninhabited mountain and places it on the mountain’s peak, and it cracks the mountain. And it collects and brings seeds from the trees and throws them there, and it becomes inhabited. They searched for a nest of wild roosters that had young, and they covered its nest with clear glass. When it came, it wanted to enter but could not. It went and brought the *shamir* and put it on it. He [Solomon’s servant] raised his voice, and it [the rooster] dropped it, and he took it. It [the rooster] went and choked itself to death on account of its oath. Benaiah said to him [Ashmedai]: What is the reason that when you saw that blind man reeling on the road,

you brought him to his path? He said to him: It was declared about him in heaven that he is a completely righteous person, and one who does something to comfort his soul will merit the world to come. And what is the reason that when you saw the drunkard reeling in the road that you brought him to his path? He said to him: It was declared about him in heaven that he is a completely evil person, and I acted to comfort his soul so that he should eat up [his portion in] the world [to come]. What is the reason that when you saw the wedding party, you cried? He said to him: The man is doomed to death within thirty days, and she [the bride] will wait thirteen years for the levirate groom, who is a minor. What is the reason that when you heard the man say to the shoemaker: Make me shoes [that will last] seven years, you laughed? He said to him: He does not have even seven days, and he wants shoe [that will last] for seven years! What is the reason that when you saw the magician doing sorcery, you laughed? He said to him: Because he was sitting over a king's treasury. Let him divine what is beneath him! He [detained] him until he built the Temple. One day, he was by himself. ...He said to him: Take the chain from me, and give me your ring, and I will show you my greatness. He took the chain off him and gave him his ring. He [Ashmedai] swallowed him. He placed one of his wings in heaven and one of his wings on earth, and threw him four hundred parasangs. Regarding this moment Solomon said: "What advantage does man have for all his toil that he toils under the sun" [Eccl. 1:3]. "And this was my portion from all my toil" [Eccl. 2:10]. What does "this" mean? Rav and Shmuel, one said: his staff, and one said: his cloak. He would go around the doorways. Every place he would reach he would say: "I am Qohelet; I was king over Israel in Jerusalem" [Eccl. 1:12]. When he came before the Sanhedrin, the Rabbis said: Now, a crazy person does not stick to one subject. What is this? They said to Benaiah: Has the king requested you before him? He said to them: No. They sent [a message] to the queens: Does the king come before you? They sent [a response]: Yes, he comes. They sent [a message] to them: Check his feet. They sent [a response] to them: He comes in stockings, and he seeks them during their period of impurity, and he also seeks Bathsheba, his mother. They brought Solomon and gave him his ring and his chain on which the Name was engraved. When he [Solomon] entered, he [Ashmedai] saw him and flew away. And even still, he [Solomon] was afraid of him. And this is what is written: "Here is Solomon's bed, with sixty warriors around it from

the mighty of Israel. Each grasps a sword and is learned in warfare, each man with a sword on his thigh against the fear of the night” [Song 3:7-8]. Rav and Shmuel, one said: [He was] a king, and a commoner, and one said: [He was] a king, and a commoner, and a king (*b. Gittin* 68a-68b).

In this version, when Ashmedai finally reaches Jerusalem, Solomon toys with him, engaging in mind-games in an effort to establish dominance over the demon. Even after Solomon extracts the information he needs and retrieves the *shamir*, he keeps Ashmedai prisoner for no other purpose than pride. During this captivity, Benaiah asks Ashmedai about his previous behavior on the way to Jerusalem. Ashmedai’s answers reveal his secret knowledge as well as halakhic understanding, a concern for justice, and a disdain for human ignorance and short-sightedness. While Solomon maintains this control for some time, Ashmedai eventually outwits Solomon, playing upon his pride and curiosity, and stripping him of his power. Ashmedai assumes the throne, taking Solomon’s likeness, while Solomon is forced to beg to stay alive. Solomon eventually appeals to the Sanhedrin, who investigate the matter. They learn that the ersatz Solomon has been soliciting Solomon’s wives when they are ritually impure and has even solicited Bathsheba, his supposed mother. The Sanhedrin allows Solomon to drive Ashmedai away, but he remains fearful of him thereafter (*b. Gittin* 68a-68b).

Although the Ashmedai legend is critical of Solomon, it also functions to reduce the severity of Solomon’s sins. He loses the throne not because of idolatry, but because he acts as a magician and tries to assert mastery over demons, using wisdom outside the scope of Torah and rabbinic sanction.⁵⁴² Solomon’s downfall is a function of his pride. Not only does he dabble in realms that he should not, but he needlessly seeks to dominate supernatural forces long after they

⁵⁴² Kalmin, *Migrating Tales*, 123.

have served his immediate needs. Thus, the Talmud aligns the Ashmedai legend with rabbinic traditions that Solomon's downfall comes as a result of his pride in his wisdom and his assurance that he could violate the letter of the law without violating its spirit.⁵⁴³ This legend, while addressing the esoteric Solomon, seeks to suppress him by having his magic get the better of him. Ultimately, it is the Sanhedrin, the repository of rabbinic jurisprudence, that saves Solomon from the consequences of his magical misadventures.⁵⁴⁴ Once again, rabbinic literature rejects the esoteric Solomon in favor of the historic Solomon. The Talmud's version of the Ashmedai legend also criticizes Solomon's use of political cunning. Solomon does not trap Ashmedai himself, but sends Benaiah to do his dirty work. This parallels Solomon's use of Benaiah as his hit man to do away with Adonijah and Joab in the second chapter of 1 Kings. Furthermore, Solomon traps Ashmedai in Jerusalem much in the same way he holds Shimei ben Gera captive in the capital. While Solomon's efforts to procure the *shamir* reflect his cunning, he is indifferent to the injustice of keeping Ashmedai prisoner. Nor does Solomon seem to have any concern for the rooster's oath or his tragic suicide when he is forced to break it.

In some respects, the tales of Solomon's exile from the throne transform Solomon into a suffering sage, much like the rabbis who authored these midrashim.⁵⁴⁵ As in many of the rabbinic traditions in which Solomon loses his throne, the Talmud in *Gittin* sees Solomon gain humility. In the Talmud's version, Solomon turns to the Sanhedrin for help (*b. Gittin* 68b). This

⁵⁴³ Sasson, מלך שלמה, 146.

⁵⁴⁴ However, it is noteworthy that the Talmud has Solomon consult rabbis regarding the cutting of stones, and it is rabbis who advise him to pursue the *shamir* by dabbling with demons (*b. Gittin* 68a). From this perspective, the Talmud's rejection of esotericism is not wholehearted. Hence, the rabbis do not reject demonology entirely. Rather, Solomon's error may be his attempt to gain mastery over demons and magical realms to serve his pride rather than his immediate needs.

⁵⁴⁵ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 131.

marks Solomon's acknowledgment of the Sanhedrin's greater legal authority, or more broadly the superiority of Torah law over the power of the king. Once he regains his throne, Solomon is chastened. No longer does he toy with supernatural powers. Rather, the Talmud, with reference to Song of Songs 3:7-8, notes that Solomon fears the evils of the night, remaining wary of Ashmedai the remainder of his life.⁵⁴⁶ Solomon's deference to the Sanhedrin runs parallel to a similar theme raised in *Ruth Rabbah* 3:2 in which David dies on the Sabbath, and the new king, Solomon, must defer to the Sanhedrin regarding the halakhic permissibility of moving David's body. There too, the midrash's intended effect is to assert the authority of rabbinic halakhah over the king's authority and to assert Torah wisdom over Solomon's wisdom.

One of the most curious aspects of the Ashmedai legend in *b. Gittin* is the demon's character. Ashmedai is not uniformly evil.⁵⁴⁷ Sasson notes that Solomon and Ashmedai function in parallel as foils for each other. Ashmedai, despite being a demon, begins the tale with surprisingly pious behavior. He learns Torah and concerns himself with seeking justice. Once he takes Solomon's place on the throne, however, his power corrupts him. He takes advantage of his power by trying to sleep with Solomon's wives and even Solomon's mother. It is this lack of shame that gives him away, allowing the Sanhedrin to depose him. Like Solomon, Ashmedai's pride leads to his downfall.⁵⁴⁸ In turn, Ashmedai's usurpation of the throne forces Solomon to experience poverty and to mingle with his subjects.

In addition, Sandra Shimoff argues that the Ashmedai legend can function as apologetic since it allows for the possibility that Solomon's sins were actually committed by an imposter

⁵⁴⁶ Sasson, *מלך ודהויט*, 147-148.

⁵⁴⁷ Shimoff, "Rabbinic Legends of Saul, Solomon, and David," 297.

⁵⁴⁸ Sasson, *מלך ודהויט*, 148-149.

during his period of exile from the throne.⁵⁴⁹ While the possibility of Ashmedai committing Solomon's sins is tantalizing, no midrashic tradition expressly adopts this apologetic strategy. Furthermore, the Ashmedai legend as it appears in *Gittin* never accuses Ashmedai of idolatry. Rather, he attempts to commit sexual impropriety with Solomon's wives and mother. However, one can argue his downfall parallels Solomon's to the extent that his desire for these women is the catalyst.

Sasson illuminates the ways in which the Ashmedai legend functions as anti-Christian polemic. Ashmedai serves as a proxy for Jesus in the sense that he is not born of man, he begins as a Torah scholar, he cares for the weak and vulnerable, and he can see the future. His water even changes into wine (*b. Gittin* 68a) as does Jesus' (John 2:3-9). Ashmedai embodies rabbinic criticism of Jesus in that he casts off the name of God, which represents the Torah and its commandments. For the rabbis, Ashmedai, like Jesus, is the Torah scholar who goes bad. The parallel between Ashmedai and Jesus is made possible by the Christian view of Solomon as a Christ figure. For the Church Fathers, Solomon's wisdom was typological of Jesus' wisdom. While Solomon built the Temple, Jesus made himself into a figurative temple, fulfilling God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. Thus, Jesus emerges in the model of Solomon but surpasses him. The rabbinic impulse to defend Solomon and to aggrandize him can be seen within the lens of religious polemic. The rabbis defend Solomon in an effort to maintain his superiority.⁵⁵⁰ While Ashmedai may serve as a Jesus figure for the purposes of anti-Christian polemics, it is less clear that the Ashmedai legend serves as Solomon apologetics. There may very well exist a Jewish impulse to defend Solomon in the face of Christian interpretation. However, the

⁵⁴⁹ Shimoff, "Rabbinic Legends of Saul, Solomon, and David," 297-298.

⁵⁵⁰ Sasson, *מגילת גיטין*, 152-157, 160-161.

Ashmedai legend does not seem to feature such apologetics. Solomon emerges wiser and more cautious, but he learns these lessons the hard way after punishment for his hubristic conduct.

Furthermore, it is not entirely clear why the Babylonian Talmud would feel a strong need to engage in anti-Christian polemics. However, even though the Babylonian sages did not have to contend directly with Christianity, the Babylonian Talmud preserves Palestinian traditions regarding Christianity. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the Babylonian Talmud contains more material about Jesus than the Palestinian Talmud. It is possible that the rivalry between Persia and Rome fostered a more anti-Christian atmosphere in Babylonia. In contrast, much of the Palestinian material predates Constantine and the Roman adoption of Christianity. Thus, the rabbis of Judea directly engaged Christian populations well before the empire adopted Christianity. Thus, while Palestinian sources have less to say about Jesus, they reflect greater dialectics between the two populations.⁵⁵¹ In addition, despite the much smaller Christian presence in Babylonia, the Babylonian Talmud is highly influenced by traditions from the Roman East and preserves material responding to Christianity even after the empire adopted Christianity as its official religion.⁵⁵²

Even if the Ashmedai legend of the Talmud does function as anti-Christian polemic, it does not directly function as Solomonic apologetic. It never overtly justifies Solomon's actions, and it seems to approve of his punishment and humiliation. Still, the legend does tend to mitigate some aspects of the Solomon narrative. Solomon loses his throne because of pride, not idolatry. The Ashmedai legend does not maintain the ambiguity regarding whether Solomon

⁵⁵¹ William Horbury, "Rabbinic Perceptions of Christianity and the History of Roman Palestine," in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine*, eds. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 355-357, 366, 373.

⁵⁵² Kalmin, *Migrating Tales*, 1, 236.

returns to the throne or not. Once Solomon submits to the authority of the Sanhedrin, he is returned to his throne. While Solomon is portrayed as arrogant and uncaring, he is forced to undergo a program of humiliation, so that once he returns to power, he is chastened. In this way, the Ashmedai legend paves the way for Solomon's rehabilitation. Solomon sins, but he is punished and learns his lesson. He no longer attempts to dabble in the demonic, demonstrating that his repentance is genuine. In this way, Solomon's wisdom and his reliance on it is trumped by rabbinic wisdom. The Ashmedai story, which concludes with the Sanhedrin's triumph over Ashmedai and Solomon's chastened return to the throne, ultimately sees magic as well as the kingship bow to rabbinic authority. The rabbinic treatment of the Ashmedai legend also demonstrates not only the rabbinic desire to contain and supplant the influence of popular magic, but it also demonstrates rabbinic consciousness of and response to competing traditions, whether Christianity or Zoroastrianism.

Agur and Lemuel

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the final two chapters of Proverbs make no mention of Solomon. Rather, they are attributed to men named Agur and Lemuel. Furthermore, nothing in either chapter seems to specifically reference Solomon. However, rabbinic tradition ties the two final chapters of Proverbs to Solomon by identifying both Agur and Lemuel as Solomon.⁵⁵³ This represents "midrashic identification," the identification of more obscure figures in Tanakh with better known characters. Identifying Agur, Lemuel, and Qohelet with Solomon allowed the rabbis to attribute the whole of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to his

⁵⁵³ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 884; Hurowitz, עַם מְבוּא וּפִירוּשׁ, מִשְׁלֵי: 559; Sasson, מֶלֶךְ וְדָדִיּוֹת, 52-53; Wolters, *Song of the Valiant Woman*, 62-63.

authorship.⁵⁵⁴ The cantillation in the Masoretic Text creates a pause between מֶלֶךְ, king, and מַשָּׂא, Massa, attenuating Lemuel from identification as the king of Massa and making room for the identification of Lemuel as Solomon.⁵⁵⁵ Furthermore, the lack of any other record of these characters, either in Scripture or in history, leaves the possibility open that their names are pseudonyms. Thematically, Lemuel at least bears some resemblance to Solomon. Lemuel is a king, and his mother preaches to him about sexual morality, temperance, and justice for the poor. She warns Lemuel not to give his strength to women (Prov. 31:3). The juxtaposition of this warning with chapter 31's depiction of the ideal woman of strength implies that it is not women, per se, that are the problem, but strange women or too many women.⁵⁵⁶

The rabbinic association of Solomon with Agur and Lemuel is not necessarily meant to be complimentary. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:10 uses the names Agur and Lemuel, as well as the other names that appear in the beginning of Proverbs 30, Yaqa and Itiel, to criticize Solomon.⁵⁵⁷ The name Agur implies that Solomon forgot words of Torah. Yaqa means “he vomited,” implying again that Solomon forgot the Torah. Lemuel somehow suggests that he spoke against God, saying, “I can amass without sinning.” Finally, Itiel implies that he thought he could overcome God. With perhaps the exception of Yaqa the midrash's construal of these names is markedly strained. Each could just as easily or perhaps more easily be read in a flattering way. The critical construal of these names reflects a concerted rabbinic effort to utilize these names as

⁵⁵⁴ Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship*, 83-85, 109-110.

⁵⁵⁵ Hurowitz, מַשָּׂא: עַם מַבּוֹא וּפִרְוֶה, 585.

⁵⁵⁶ Megan K. DeFranza, “The Proverbs 31 ‘Woman of Strength’: An Argument for a Primary-Sense Translation,” *Priscilla Papers*, 25, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 21-22; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 886.

⁵⁵⁷ Sasson, מֶלֶךְ וּמַדִּיט, 53.

high criticism of Solomon.⁵⁵⁸ The focus of this criticism is on Solomon's apostasy. This critique comes within the context of Lemuel's mother's warnings about the potential disastrous effects of giving one's strength to women. Furthermore, the criticism resounds with the message that Solomon forgot the Torah and sought to overcome God. Thus, this particular criticism falls within the criticism the rabbis expressed for Solomon's pride in his own wisdom and his failed efforts to outsmart God by trying to violate the law without violating the spirit of the law.

Utilizing Solomon's identity with Lemuel, a number of midrashic texts continue the tale of how Solomon slept late after his wedding night, preventing the Temple from opening on its first day of operation. The people send Bathsheba to chastise him (*b. Sanhedrin* 70b; *Lev. Rab.* 12:5; *Num. Rab.* 10:4). These midrashim place the words of Lemuel's mother into Bathsheba's mouth.

...They went and informed Bathsheba, his mother, and she went and woke him and chastised him, as it is written, "the burden about which his mother admonished him" [Prov. 31:1]. Rabbi Johanan said: this teaches that his mother bent him over a column and said to him, "What use, my son?" [Prov. 31:2]. Everyone knows that your father was a God-fearing man. Now they will say, since Bathsheba is his mother, she caused him to do this. "And what use, son of my womb?" [Prov. 31:2]. All the women of your father's house, when they were pregnant again, they would not see the face of the king. But I pressed and entered so that my son would be refined and vigorous. "And what use, son of my vow?" [Prov. 31:2]. All of the women of your father's house, when they were pregnant, would make vows and say: Let us have a son fit for the kingship. But I vowed and said: Let me have a vigorous son, learned in Torah and fit for prophecy. "Do not give your strength to women" [Prov. 31:3], so that he will chase after perversion and they will confound a man's mind. "One who associates with whores will lose his wealth" [Prov. 29:3]. "And your paths are those that destroy kings" [Prov. 31:3]. The Torah

⁵⁵⁸ See also *Midrash Qohelet* 1:2 and *Tanhuma Va'Era* 5.

warned and said, “And he shall not amass wives” [Deut. 17:17]. Be careful in these matters, because they destroy kings. “It is not for kings, Lemuel” [Prov. 31:4]. What do you have to do with kings who say: Why should we have a God? to act like they do? ...And from where [do we learn] that Solomon repented and confessed? As it is said, “For I was more brutish than a man” [Prov. 30:2]... (*Num. Rab.* 10:4).⁵⁵⁹

This tradition portrays Solomon as weak and ineffectual, pulled between the competing influences of two women, his wife and his mother, the former urging him toward idolatry, while the latter seeks to maintain his loyalty to God. In this sense, the midrash seeks to address how Solomon could so easily be swayed to idolatry despite his great wisdom: Solomon may be wise, but he is weak and easily influenced.⁵⁶⁰

This midrash, however, also creates a space in which Solomon can repent. We have already seen how the midrash plays fast and loose with the Solomonic timeline, juxtaposing his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh with the dedication of the Temple. Here, it also allows for the possibility that Bathsheba chastises Solomon in response to his idolatry following the influence of his foreign wives. In response to these sins, Bathsheba takes Solomon to task, spanking him and scolding him as if he were still a little child. By turning to the question of Solomon’s repentance, the midrash implies that Solomon takes his mother’s rebuke to heart. Furthermore, the text never asks whether Solomon repented. Rather, it presumes such repentance and seeks scriptural evidence of it. In other words, the midrash presumes that Solomon does in fact repent. It merely seeks scriptural confirmation. The midrash finds it in the words of Agur, who declares himself brutish and without understanding (Prov. 30:2). Agur

⁵⁵⁹ Much of this midrash is dedicated to warnings about the dangers of wine and alcohol. I have omitted those parts. The last line I include in this excerpt also comes in the midst of that discussion about wine. A shorter version of Solomon’s repentance based on the same verse in Proverbs appears in *b. Sanhedrin* 70b, which juxtaposes his repentance directly with Bathsheba’s rebuke.

⁵⁶⁰ Sasson, *מלך ומדינת*, 97-99.

continues: “And I did not learn wisdom, so that I should know the knowledge of the Holy One” (Prov. 30:3).

This linking of the words of Agur and Lemuel is not without textual basis. Christopher Ansberry notes that the two chapters are linked stylistically. Chapter 30, which constitutes the words of Agur, functions as a monologue and is punctuated by numerical musings. Chapter 31, the words of Lemuel, begins with a dialogue followed by a study based on alphabetical lettering. In addition, Proverbs 30:2-4 express the limits of human wisdom, acknowledging God as the only true possessor of wisdom. The text thus offers the conclusion that human knowledge is incapable of attaining true wisdom but must rather rely on divine revelation as preserved in the covenantal tradition.⁵⁶¹ While chapters 30 and 31 do not mention Solomon by name, it is not hard to see how the rabbis could so easily read Solomon into these two chapters. The lessons regarding the pitfalls of human wisdom are there in the text. The identification of Agur and Lemuel as pseudonyms for Solomon allows the rabbis to apply those lessons specifically to Solomon.

Furthermore, Hurowitz notices the thematic connection between the words of Agur and the conclusion of Ecclesiastes. Agur confesses that he has no wisdom compared to Godly wisdom, which is unobtainable. The penultimate line of Ecclesiastes concludes that in the end wisdom is futile, and man must fear God and obey His commandments. True wisdom is the sole province of God.⁵⁶² Godly wisdom is unknowable. However, God provides humanity with the Torah, which acts as a practical and comprehensible guide for human understanding of God’s wisdom. Agur’s message of subordinating one’s wisdom to God’s through His Scriptures is

⁵⁶¹ Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son*, 163, 166-168.

⁵⁶² Hurowitz, *עם מבוא ופירוש, משלי*, 558; See also Dell, *Book of Proverbs*, 83.

wholly consonant with the identical message of the rabbis. Solomon's error was to trust in his own wisdom and to think he could understand God's wisdom. Instead, Solomon should have obeyed the Torah's commandments and not try to outsmart them. Still, the rabbis do not use Agur's words solely to beat Solomon. They also frame them as Solomon's expression of contrition. As such, the rabbis provide scriptural basis for Solomon's repentance, thus reversing the implication through silence at the end of the Solomon narrative in Kings that Solomon never repented. In terms of rabbinic exegesis, the rabbinic treatment of Chapters 30 and 31 of Proverbs demonstrates the malleability of Scripture in rabbinic hands. While Agur and Lemuel have no obvious connection to Solomon, the rabbis are able to not only identify them as Solomon but are able, in turn, to use them to both criticize Solomon and to rehabilitate him.

Solomon's Repentance

Solomon's repentance or lack thereof has consequences for the rabbinic final estimation of Solomon. A person can commit terrible sins, but the rabbis always allow for the possibility of repentance. This can be achieved anytime in a person's lifetime, although one is cautioned not to put it off lest that lifetime end before expected. In the rabbinic mind, repentance does not exempt a person from punishment. However, repentance, like punishment, has consequences for a person's final judgment before God and one's fate in the world to come. Sincere repentance can assure one a place in the world to come, just as punishment in this world can achieve atonement, assuring reward in the world to come. Kings are no exception. For the rabbis, this is as true for Solomon as any other human being.

Yet Solomon's fate is unclear because there is no indication in Kings that he ever repents for his sins.⁵⁶³ Despite this lack of scriptural evidence, the rabbinic sources, as we have

⁵⁶³ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 170.

discussed previously, debate whether Solomon ever returned to the throne. This debate reflects the understanding that Solomon's purported loss of his throne functions as punishment for his sins. If so, a return to the throne would indicate that Solomon learned his lesson and repented. *Ruth Rabbah* 5:6 [14] closes the tale of Solomon's losing his throne to an angelic look-alike with a description of his return to power. This midrash assures the reader that Solomon not only "ate" in this world, but merited enjoyment during messianic times as well as claiming his place in the world to come. *Ruth Rabbah* 5:6 [14] offers no clues as to how Solomon regained the throne or what he did to ensure his immortal fate. However, the implication is clear that God forgave him for his sins. This implies that his temporary exile was sufficient to expiate his guilt.

Some midrashim attempt to fill the scriptural gap by articulating Solomon's penitence. *Exodus Rabbah* 6:1 does so by using the words of Qohelet, already so strongly identified with Solomon, as an expression of contrition. The midrash characterizes Ecclesiastes 2:12, "And I turned to see wisdom, madness, and foolishness..." as an admission of Solomon's own foolishness. The midrash construes this verse to mean that Solomon thought he understood and could outsmart the Torah, when in reality his purported wisdom was nothing more than madness and foolishness. In addition, as we have just discussed in the previous section, rabbinic sources repurpose the words of Agur in Proverbs 30:2 to act as Solomon's statement of contrition (*b. Sanhedrin* 70b; *Num. Rab.* 10:4).⁵⁶⁴

Seder Olam 15 credits Solomon's composition of the three books attributed to him to divine inspiration at the end of his life. This would locate Solomon's writings at a time after his sins. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:5 ends the debate over whether Solomon should be denied the world to come with the addendum that divine inspiration rested on him, allowing him to

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 172-173.

compose his three books. This implies that God forgives Solomon in the end and inspires his three works.⁵⁶⁵ Furthermore, the rabbinic traditions regarding the order in which Solomon wrote his three works offer a clue about his possible repentance. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:10 expresses varying rabbinic opinions as to when Solomon wrote his three works, debating whether they were written simultaneously or during different phases of his life. There is even disagreement as to the order in which he composed the three works. However, the varying opinions consistently list Ecclesiastes as his final composition (*Song Rab.* 1:10). Because Ecclesiastes concludes with the declaration that one should fear God and follow His commandments, the rabbinic positioning of Ecclesiastes as Solomon's final book suggests that his final position was one of piety and contrition.⁵⁶⁶

At the end of the previous chapter, we discussed how the rabbinic determination that Solomon wrote his three works through divine inspiration made the problem posed by Solomon all the more difficult. Wisdom may not protect a person from sin, as one can fool oneself into trusting one's own wisdom over God's wisdom. This becomes a favorite rabbinic explanation for Solomon's sins. However, it is far more difficult to understand how someone who has experienced prophecy or even divine inspiration could sin. How can someone who has served as the channel for God's wisdom into words ever forget about God and turn to the worship of pagan deities? The rabbis do not have an answer for that question, because in their minds it is inconceivable and unanswerable. In the midrashim we have just discussed, Solomon's divine inspiration no longer poses this problem. Instead, the rabbis utilize it to resolve the Solomonic

⁵⁶⁵ Sasson, *שיר השירים*, 115.

⁵⁶⁶ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 175-176. Cf. Rashi on *b. Bava Batra* 14b who reads the ordering of the books of Tanakh as indicating a later composition for the Song of Songs during Solomon's old age. Weitzman surmises that this position also reflects skepticism about wisdom, which is as elusive as love itself (177-179).

problem. Yes, Solomon's arrogance led him to sin. However, he learned his lesson and atoned for his sins. Solomon's atonement is evidenced by his writings, all of which are the product of divine inspiration. God would not have granted divine inspiration to Solomon if he had not repented. Thus, the three Solomonic works stand as testaments to Solomon's repentance, which is also reflected in the texts themselves.

As Weitzman notes, "One of the reasons that Solomon is so honored by Jews, Christians, and Muslims is that, by building the Temple, he made it possible for the sinful to change the destiny decreed for them by God." Solomon built the Temple, and it was the Temple that allowed Israel to cleanse itself from its sins. In this way, Solomon facilitated redemption. Thus, it is not surprising that rabbinic tradition would allow Solomon to redeem himself.⁵⁶⁷ Yet it is not the merit of the Temple that the rabbis cite in discovering Solomon's repentance. Rather, Solomon's repentance is found in Scripture. For the rabbis, study of Torah took primacy over Temple ritual, especially after the Temple was destroyed. The rabbis mine Tanakh for evidence of Solomon's repentance, ultimately finding it in his own words. Scripture, in the form of the Book of Kings, indicted Solomon. But through Scripture, Solomon is redeemed. Ironically, the Scriptures most often employed as evidence of Solomon's repentance are the Solomonic works themselves. Whether through the words contained in those works or through their evidence of Solomon's divine inspiration, they act as rabbinic evidence of God's forgiveness of Solomon. While Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were initially written to castigate Solomon, the rabbis repurpose them to redeem Solomon and to offer proof of his genuine repentance. This does not necessarily mean that the rabbis were determined to save Solomon because of his identity as Temple builder or because of his revered position in Christianity and later in Islam. While those

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 110-111.

factors may have played a role, the rabbinic impulse to allow Solomon to repent may also reflect on the importance of repentance in rabbinic theology. In this sense, Solomon's midrashic repentance functions homiletically, assuring Jewish audiences that no person, no matter how great the sin, is beyond the purview of genuine repentance.

4.4 Criticism Versus Apologetics

Sasson argues that the rabbis viewed individuals as either righteous or sinful. This is not to say that an individual is fated to one status or the other. People can change, and the rabbis always hold out the possibility of repentance. But a person's status is determined by the present, not the past. Thus, a sinner who repents retroactively cleanses his or her own past. Much of the disparity among rabbinic evaluations of Solomon stems from the unique problem he poses. Solomon's great wisdom, his status as a prophet, and his building of the Temple stand in stark contrast with his later sins, especially his ultimate idolatry. To complicate matters, the rabbis determine that Solomon is the recipients of divine inspiration in the authorship of the three books attributed to him. According to Sasson, these contradictions force the rabbis to decide between three alternatives: either Solomon never sinned at all, or he was fatally flawed from the beginning, or he sinned but then repented. Those rabbis who understood him to have repented would seek to mitigate his sins, while those who viewed him as unrepentant would impute his sinfulness to his entire lifetime.⁵⁶⁸

Sasson's claim that repentance mitigates prior sins finds support in rabbinic literature. There are a number of stories in which sinful individuals earn a place in the world to come through a final act of repentance. For example, the Roman executioner who oversees the

⁵⁶⁸ Sasson, *מלך ומדייט*, 164-168.

burning of Rabbi Ḥanina ben Tradyon earns a place in the world to come, despite devoting his life to torturing others, by mercifully expediting Rabbi Ḥanina's demise before falling victim to the flames himself (*b. Avodah Zarah* 18a). It is less clear, however, that sins later in life erase the value of good deeds accomplished earlier. For example, the rabbis struggle with the apostasy of Elisha ben Abuyah and excommunicate him, yet they continue to cite his earlier teachings as authoritative, although sometimes they refuse to refer to him by name. As a result, repentance becomes supremely important to the rabbis because of its tremendous power. The possibility that Solomon does not repent is troubling. However, the corollary, that Solomon's failure to repent undermines all of his accomplishments and renders him irredeemably sinful, does not necessarily follow. The rabbinic ability to entertain a more nuanced Solomon may explain their hesitance to completely condemn Solomon for his idolatry and allow them to defend him despite his sins, regardless of whether he ever repented.

A number of scholars like to attribute both defenses and criticisms of Solomon to issues extending well beyond biblical exegesis for its own sake. According to Shimoff, criticism of David and Solomon in the rabbinic literature served as veiled criticism of the Patriarch in Palestine and the Exilarch in Babylon, both of whom claimed Davidic descent. Conversely, rabbinic traditions that defend Solomon are expressed by those sages who boasted Davidic descent and their allies. For example, Shimoff reads criticism of Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh as criticism of the Patriarchy's cooperation with Rome. Similarly, Solomon's deference to the Sanhedrin is meant to exert the sages' authority over halakhah and the community over the authority of Rome. In another example, Shimoff identifies Rabbi Samuel bar Naḥmani, who relates the tradition that Solomon never sinned (*b. Shabbat* 56b), as a friend of Rabbi Judah II, the Patriarch, while Rabbi Nathan, whom Samuel bar Naḥmani cites, is

identified as the son of the Exilarch. Furthermore, depictions of Solomon's opulent meals (*b. Bava Metzia* 86b; *Num. Rab.* 21:19; *Mid. Qoh.* 9:11 [1]; *PRK* 6; *Pes. Rab.* 16; *Tanh. Pinhas* 12; *Mid. I.* 50 (2)) are subtly critical references to Rabbi Judah the Prince's wealth and extravagance.⁵⁶⁹

Shimoff's conclusions are in basic agreement with those of Moses Aberbach and Leivy Smolar. They discuss the Talmud's treatment of Jeroboam in *b. Sanhedrin* 101b. There, Rabbi Johanan argues that Jeroboam was rewarded for criticizing Solomon's limiting access to Jerusalem, but he was punished for doing so publicly. Rabbi Johanan was reliant on the Patriarch for a livelihood (*b. Sotah* 21a). Aberbach and Smolar read this as Rabbi Johanan's rebuke of the Patriarch's critics. While Rabbi Johanan was protective of fellow scholars in the face of the Patriarch Judah II's withdrawal of support and privileges from Torah scholars, he also defended the Patriarch's dignity by insisting criticism be made privately. Thus, Aberbach and Smolar conclude that rabbinic exegesis often exists more as an attempt to comment on contemporary issues than as deliberate reflection on the biblical material.⁵⁷⁰

Scholars who see the defense and criticism of Solomon as reflecting attitudes toward the Patriarch and Exilarch note that there seem to be discernible trends in different time periods. For example, Sasson argues that the first generation of amoraim in Palestine exhibits a greater propensity for material that is critical of Solomon. Sasson surmises that the death of Rabbi Judah the Prince, a descendant of David, a defender of the Davidic dynasty, and a bit of a messianic figure in his own right, opened the floodgates for material critical of Solomon and

⁵⁶⁹ Shimoff, "The Hellenization of Solomon," 458-459, 461, 463; Shimoff, "Rabbinic Legends of Saul, Solomon, and David," 4-5, 8, 293-294, 301, 309-310, 323-324.

⁵⁷⁰ Moses Aberbach and Leivy Smolar, "Jeroboam and Solomon: Rabbinic Interpretations," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 59, no. 2 (Oct. 1968): 119-127, 132. See also, Shimoff, "Rabbinic Legends of Saul, Solomon, and David," 301-302.

other figures associated with the House of David. Sasson bases this argument on changes to the Jewish environment following the tannaitic period rather than on the relationship of any particular rabbi to office of the Patriarch or Exilarch, mainly because those relationships are extremely difficult to establish. Sasson also suggests that criticism of Solomon may reflect criticism of the Roman Empire. Solomon's reign resembled that of the Roman Empire in the sense that it occupied multiethnic populations, embraced ambitious building projects, and ended with the weakening of central authority and assault by foreign enemies. In this sense, criticism of Solomon becomes veiled criticism of Rome.⁵⁷¹

Sasson also argues that Babylonian sources tend to treat Solomon more apologetically. The rabbis of Palestine had to contend with Christianity. Their ability to criticize biblical figures bolstered their argument that God never abandons His people or the covenant with them despite their sins. Thus, with regard to Solomon, the exegetical trend was to demonstrate how Solomon did sin, but that God forgave Solomon's sins and restored him to his throne. The Babylonian sages, living in a polytheistic society, did not face the same challenges. Rather, they were driven to defend biblical figures in an effort to demonstrate the superiority of monotheism. In both Palestine and Babylonia, the sages were hesitant to hold Solomon accountable for idolatry, so both groups tend to defend him against that particular charge.⁵⁷²

Contra to Sasson, Richard Kalmin sees a greater apologetic tendency in Palestinian sources toward David and the Davidic dynasty, while Babylonian sources tend to be more critical. The fourth generation of Babylonian amoraim saw an increase in Palestinian teachings, and the anonymous editors of the Babylonian Talmud also seem to take a somewhat more

⁵⁷¹ Sasson, *מלך ודדיט*, 168-171.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 171-173.

apologetic approach toward David. Kalmin questions the commonly held theory that rabbinic attitudes toward David and Solomon reflect attitudes toward the Patriarchate. This position is made problematic by the fact that any particular rabbi – Kalmin uses Rav as an example – may have multivalent opinions about David, casting him as a saint in one instance, and castigating him as a sinner in another. In addition, Kalmin identifies texts in which Palestinian rabbis are directly critical of the Patriarchate without the need for veiled criticism via David as a foil, while at the same time maintaining an unwavering defense of David’s character. Kalmin surmises that the two communities in Palestine and Babylonia may have merely adopted disparate cultural approaches to their understanding of biblical heroes, with Palestinian authorities preferring to lionize Israel’s ancestors as models of behavior and Babylonian authorities preferring to learn from their mistakes. Or Davidic apologetics in Palestine may have responded to disputations with heretics, pagans, and Christians, while Babylonian rabbis did not face the same kind of theological challenges.⁵⁷³

Although Sasson partially attributes attitudes toward Solomon to political and social circumstances, he challenges Shimoff’s conclusions and acknowledges the limitations of attributing rabbinic positions to political positions. It is difficult to reliably trace the sources for many midrashic traditions. And even when a source can be identified, it is extremely difficult to determine whether that opinion is the product of political beliefs even presuming one could determine the political beliefs of any particular rabbi of late antiquity.⁵⁷⁴ Furthermore, there are many instances when rabbinic opinions do not line up along geographic lines or according to historical periods. Rather, the rabbis’ positions on Solomon in any given case may reflect their

⁵⁷³ Richard Kalmin, “Portrayals of Kings in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 3, no. 4 (1996): 329-330, 335-338.

⁵⁷⁴ Sasson, מלך ומדינה, 12.

understanding of the Solomon narrative as a whole, whether he was a good king who erred at the end of his reign, or whether he was flawed from the start.⁵⁷⁵ It is certainly true that rabbinic literature emerges from a historical, social, and political context and may often reflect those conditions and concerns.⁵⁷⁶ However, as Carol Bakhos notes, “There are times when midrashic texts elucidate history, but again, this is not always the case.” A student of midrashic literature must be cognizant that there are limitations to extracting history from rabbinic texts, especially in the face of the strong temptation to read history into those texts.⁵⁷⁷ As such, any particular midrash that criticizes Solomon may not always reflect the historical, political concerns of the rabbis who wrote it. Sometimes Solomon is just Solomon.

As we see from these varying conclusions, scholars disagree in their assessment of Solomonic criticism within rabbinic literature. One scholar sees Palestinian sources as more critical, while another sees the Babylonian sources as more critical. One scholar finds a trend of criticism in the first generation of amoraim, while another sees a shift toward apologetics in the fourth generation of amoraim. I also surveyed the midrashic materials on Solomon for discernible trends. I systematically searched the early midrashic traditions⁵⁷⁸ for rabbinic reflections on Solomon. I compiled a list of hundreds of references to Solomon, noting the literary source as well as the rabbinic attributions cited in that source. Wherever possible, I

⁵⁷⁵ Sasson, "אי-לך ארץ, שמלכך נער": השגות חז"ל על משפטו של שלמה", 200.

⁵⁷⁶ Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham*, 27.

⁵⁷⁷ Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 131.

⁵⁷⁸ I excluded later medieval midrashic collections and some of the more obscure collections collected by scholars from fragmented sources. In essence, I looked at fundamentally the same sources that Sasson treats. In addition, I limited myself to the manuscript versions of these sources as they appear in the Bar Ilan Responsa Project database.

identified the rabbis to whom sources were attributed and determined when they lived.⁵⁷⁹ I then made a preliminary determination whether the particular source reflected positively, neutrally, or negatively on Solomon. This last step was admittedly subjective as it reflected my instinctual response to the source. I will admit that my own inclination is to find texts critical of Solomon. Even apologetic sources can be seen as subtly critical since they tacitly admit a need to defend Solomon from criticism. In my own assessment of midrashim about Solomon, I discerned a slightly stronger willingness to criticize Solomon among third generation amoraim in Palestine. However, by no means is this trend overwhelming. Furthermore, I was unable to find a marked disparity between Palestinian and Babylonian sources in their willingness to defend or chastise Solomon. My cataloging of the midrashic sources did not produce the same results found by Sasson and Kalmin. This overall lack of consensus calls into doubt whether any true trend exists.

There is an additional methodological problem posed by any attempt to discern the basis for rabbinic attitudes toward Solomon or even historical trends that scholars fail to discuss. Whether any particular rabbinic text is disposed positively or negatively toward Solomon is a somewhat subjective determination. In our discussion of major rabbinic traditions about Solomon, I have given greater focus, perhaps unfairly, to those traditions that are more critical of Solomon. In addition, I have analyzed many of those texts in ways that have construed them as critiques. However, another reader can view the same midrashim as apologetic toward Solomon. To use an extreme example, I have read the rabbinic efforts to exclude Solomon from the world to come as the highest possible form of rebuke. Shimoff, on the other hand, depicts these

⁵⁷⁹ For dating, I relied upon the Bar Ilan Responsa Project database's biographies of tannaim and amoraim. Even with this tool, identification is often uncertain because of the commonality of many rabbinic names, making it difficult to determine which rabbinic figure with that name made the statement attributed to him.

traditions as apologetics for the Davidic dynasty. For Shimoff, the efforts of the sages to exclude Solomon are thwarted by heaven, thus promoting the superior authority of the Exilarch. The version in *b. Sanhedrin* 104b is cited in the name of Rav, who was a descendant of David. The version in *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:5 is attributed to Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, whom Shimoff asserts would have been supportive of the Patriarchate.⁵⁸⁰ Regardless of the relative merits of the arguments regarding whether this tradition criticizes or defends Solomon, the very existence of such varying opinions about a rabbinic text indicates that no reliable consensus of historical trends is truly possible. If readers cannot agree on whether any particular text is positive or negative, then they certainly cannot agree on historical trends within such texts. Furthermore, Sasson and Kalmin are correct in their contention that the attribution of rabbinic opinions to political commentary is a dicey project at best. In this sense, we are better served with an understanding of rabbinic exegesis that is more broadly multivalent. The impulse to identify politically motivated trends in rabbinic literature may be self-confirming. Because rabbinic literature is so broad and varied, it is possible to find whatever we seek in it, just as it is possible to find biblical verses in isolation that support any political position. However, the mélange of rabbinic voices preserved in the rabbinic literature make overarching political trends less likely to emerge. As such, we are far more secure relating those traditions to their purported exegetical purposes rather than to political motivations.

In the end, we are left with a wide variety of rabbinic texts taking varied and opposing views of Solomon. We have examined midrashim that laud Solomon and others that castigate him. Given the varied response from a wide variety of rabbinic authorities over the course of several centuries, we cannot conclude that the rabbis adopted any particular view of Solomon to

⁵⁸⁰ Shimoff, "Rabbinic Legends of Saul, Solomon, and David," 306-309.

the exclusion of any other. However, we do see some consistency throughout rabbinic literature. For instance, even those midrashim that address Solomon's reputation for esoteric powers and mastery over demons criticize him for his forays into magic. Thus, rabbinic literature fairly consistently rejects the esoteric Solomon of popular imagination and Christian literary works. In addition, the vast majority of rabbinic midrashim react to the problematic Solomon described in Kings, not the idealized Solomon of Chronicles. Apologetic midrashim must contend with the material in Kings, attempting to construe that text in ways that are favorable to Solomon. Even those midrashim that praise Solomon without engaging in apologetics tend to base their praise on material from Kings, not Chronicles. While Chronicles is often the source of proof-texts in many midrashim, very few midrashim completely ignore the Solomon of Kings in favor of the idealized Solomon of Chronicles. In this sense, the rabbis overwhelmingly decline Chronicles' implicit invitation to reimagine Solomon's reign as an idyllic utopia.⁵⁸¹ Thus, the rabbis of late antiquity preserve the dichotomy presented in Kings between the two portraits of Solomon, the ideal king of the Golden Age who falls from grace, and the sinful king who was failed from the start. However, the rabbis complicate this debate by adding the element of Solomon's divine inspiration to the equation. Solomon's divine inspiration, or even prophecy, makes his sins all the more incomprehensible while also offering evidence of his ultimate redemption. This divine inspiration is amplified in the targumic literature, especially in the targumim to the Solomonic works.

⁵⁸¹ Midrashim along the lines of *Exodus Rabbah* 15:25 are the rare exceptions.

CHAPTER FIVE: SOLOMON IN THE TARGUMIM

5.1 Introduction to Targumim

Targumim purport to be translations of biblical works into Aramaic. The move to create these translations emerged in the postexilic period when Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the vernacular for most Jews, even within the restoration community in Judah. Ironically, Jewish populations no longer understood the Torah in its Hebrew original, even as the Torah as a written text was gaining central importance in Judaism. As a result, Aramaic translations became increasingly in demand. However, targumim vary wildly in their fidelity to Aramaic translation. Some veer only slightly from literal translation. Others infuse their translations with midrashic material. Yet others seem to embody midrashic treatments of the text with only the slimmest pretense of translation.⁵⁸²

Most targumim, including Targum Jonathan on the Prophets, seem to have originated in Palestine but to have undergone some revision in Babylonia, as they appear to reflect Babylonian influence. Dating of these targumim is difficult since they seem to contain material that both predates Christianity and post-dates Islam. Targumim are sometimes characterized as Aramaic paraphrase of Scripture because rather than serving as strict translations, they often include exegetical commentary.⁵⁸³ The targumim for Ketuvim are even more difficult to date. Many

⁵⁸² Philip Alexander, “‘Translation and Midrash Completely Fused Together’? The Form of the Targums to Canticles, Lamentations and Qohelet,” *Aramaic Studies*, 9.1 (2011): 83.

⁵⁸³ Robert Hayward, “Targum,” in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine*, eds. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 237-239; Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 316.

seem to fall anywhere within the period of the fourth through ninth centuries.⁵⁸⁴ The Talmud offers no awareness of the existence of any targumim for Ketuvim, yet there are targumim for every book of Ketuvim with the exception of Ezra-Nehemiah and Daniel, large portions of which are already written in Aramaic.⁵⁸⁵ These dates for the targumim place their composition in and around the same time that rabbinic literature of late antiquity was being produced. While targumim constitute a unique genre of literature, their historical production in parallel with midrash makes their reflection of midrashic traditions unsurprising. The question that prevails in the study of targumim is whether the targumim derive their midrashic material from midrash or whether shared traditions appear simultaneously in both genres of Jewish literary expression.

Despite receiving considerable scholarly attention, the targumim are often viewed with less significance than other forms of rabbinic literature. As far as generating respect among scholars as well as Jewish readership, they come in a distant third to the Talmud and midrash. Part of the reason for this attitude is that they are viewed as popular rather than as more serious literary works. In addition, the targumim are often viewed as derivative of earlier midrashic literature, with non-targum scholars presuming that it is the targum that borrows from the midrash and not the other way around. Philip Alexander complains that scholars do not even allow for the possibility that the targum and the midrash might derive material from a common source. Determining sources is made difficult by the fact that so much of midrashic tradition was oral in late antiquity.⁵⁸⁶ Furthermore, midrash and exegetical targumim are no exceptions to

⁵⁸⁴ Hayward, "Targum," 238.

⁵⁸⁵ McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 316.

⁵⁸⁶ Philip S. Alexander, "Tradition and Originality in the Targum of the Song of Songs," in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, eds. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 319-322.

the general observation that exegetical retellings of Scripture tend to be composites of earlier traditions, which expand upon or alter those traditions for new purposes.⁵⁸⁷ Thus, even if targumim draw on material from midrashic sources, they reconfigure that material for their own exegetical purposes.

The comparatively lower level of attention given to the targumim in contemporary scholarship obscures the fact that the targumim were highly influential in late antiquity and into the Middle Ages. The influence of the targumim may have been augmented by their ritual use in synagogues on holidays, a practice that persisted in Sepharad into the tenth and eleventh centuries, long after Aramaic was supplanted by Arabic as the vernacular, and even later into the Middle Ages in Ashkenaz.⁵⁸⁸ Targumim were probably more widely circulated than midrashic collections, making the midrashic borrowing from targumim more likely than the reverse scenario, which is the usual assumption. Furthermore, the scholarly denigration of targumim is a relatively recent phenomenon. It was not until the Renaissance that targumim were viewed with lower regard. Their earlier esteem is reflected in the frequency with which the medieval commentators cite them. However, Christian interest in targumim grew during the Renaissance, especially in response to the Protestant Reformation's interest in understanding the authentic meaning of Scripture. This Christian interest in targumim may explain their drop in esteem among Jewish authorities and scholars beginning around the same time.⁵⁸⁹

For our purposes, the general popularity of the targumim increases their potential role in the Jewish understanding of Solomon. We know that the medieval exegetes were familiar with

⁵⁸⁷ James L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 30-33.

⁵⁸⁸ Rachel S. Mikva, "Midrash in the Synagogue and the Attenuation of Targum," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 18 (2011): 321-326.

⁵⁸⁹ Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 13, 22.

midrashic literature because of their frequent incorporation of that material into their commentary. Yet, the medieval Jewish commentators were equally familiar with the targumim and made frequent references to them in their efforts to elucidate meaning from the text. This reference to the targumim was not restricted to etymology, as many commentators found exegetical material within the targumim equally enlightening. For that reason, we now turn to the targumic sources that pertain to biblical works involving Solomon. As with the midrashic material in the previous chapter, we will examine the targumic portrayals of Solomon for critical and apologetic tendencies.

5.2 Targum to Kings

Targum Yonatan to the Book of Kings seems to date to the Second Temple period, but hard evidence is scant. It could have a later provenance.⁵⁹⁰ It operates as mostly a direct translation, with occasional minimal expansions and digressions in order to elucidate difficult language or to fill in narrative gaps. It does not exhibit long expansions incorporating midrashic traditions, although small amounts do appear. Most often, it will veer from a purely literal translation only to add a word or two of linguistic or theological clarification, although occasionally it might include a longer exegetical thought.

With regard to Solomon, the Targum to Kings exhibits some apologetic features. For example, in 1 Kings 3:16, it renders the famous prostitutes, זונות in the Hebrew original, as פונדקאן, hostesses or innkeepers, thus removing some of the taint of Solomon's dealing directly with prostitutes. The transformation of prostitutes into innkeepers also preserves the ideal nature of Solomon's Golden Age. However, the term פונדקיתא can mean harlot as well as hostess or

⁵⁹⁰ Dray, *Translation and Interpretation*, 48, 131, 192.

innkeeper.⁵⁹¹ Thus, the Targum's translation in this instance may not be as apologetic as it seems. The Targum does insert added piety into its rendering of David's exhortation that Solomon be a man of strength, אִישׁ חַיִל, in 1 Kings 2:2, by translating the term as גַּבַר דְּדַחִיל הַטָּאִין, a man who fears sin.⁵⁹² These examples, however, do not reflect directly on Solomon. The former reflects a concern for propriety in general, and the latter, rendering the words of David, says more about David' piety than Solomon's.

Despite the occasional, mild apologetics, the Targum to Kings makes no concerted effort to alter the overall evaluation of Solomon presented in Kings. Neither Solomon nor Rehoboam is portrayed in the most flattering light. In chapter 3, the Targumist makes no attempt to cleanse the fact that Solomon worships at high places (1 Kg. 3:3). One might argue that this is not particularly problematic in the first place since the Temple had not yet been built. Yet, even when the text describes Solomon as building shrines for the gods of his foreign wives, the Targum does not shy away from this fact, but translates verse 11:7 faithfully. Thus, to the extent that the Targum to Kings has any division of loyalties between faithful adherence to the text and the desire to whitewash Solomon's problematic conduct, fidelity to the text wins.⁵⁹³

Notably, however, the Targum to Kings does credit Solomon with prophecy. 1 Kings 5:13 states, "And he spoke of the trees, from the cedar in the Lebanon through the hyssop that emerges from the wall, and he spoke of the beasts, and of the birds, and of creeping creatures, and of the fish." The Targum alters this verse to read, "And he prophesied about the kings of the house of David that were destined to rule in this world and in the world to come of the messiah,

⁵⁹¹ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud and Midrashic Literature* (1926), <http://www.tyndalearchive.com/TABS/Jastrow/index.htm>, 1144.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 28-29, 64.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 70, 107-109.

and he prophesied about the beasts, and birds, and swarming creatures, and the fish” (Tg. Kg. 5:13). Carol Dray argues that this may reflect a broader understanding of prophecy based on Solomon’s intimacy with God and his gift for wisdom.⁵⁹⁴ However, the Targum specifically describes Solomon prophetically looking into the future. While the midrashim are willing to conclude that Solomon receives divine inspiration in the composition of his three works, the rabbis were far more hesitant to credit him with full-fledged prophecy. Occasional midrashic pieces call Solomon a prophet, but almost all of these sources limit his prophecy to the composition of his three works. Very few are willing to give him broader prophetic powers of seeing into Israel’s future.⁵⁹⁵ However, the targumim, as we see in Targum to Kings and will see in other targumim, have no such hesitance in declaring Solomon a prophet in the full sense of the word. Thus, even though the targumim emerge roughly around the same time as much of midrashic literature, we see certain divergences between the two genres that extend beyond style. This indicates that while the midrashim and the targumim may share common midrashic traditions, the targumim as a genre arrive at different conclusions than the midrashim. This may indicate that the targumim are not the products of the rabbis despite the fact that they often reflect a similar orthodox piety espoused by the midrashim. Because targumim are not attributed to named authors or even cited rabbinic sources, we know very little about how the targumim were produced.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 115-116.

⁵⁹⁵ See *Tanhuma Vayikra* 6 and *Tanhuma Aharei Mot* 1 as examples of midrashim that portray Solomon as a prophet who foresees future events.

5.3 Targum Qohelet

Targum Qohelet, a purported translation of Ecclesiastes, is, like other targumim to works in Ketuvim, a later targum. Targum Qohelet exhibits familiarity with the Babylonian Talmud, which closed in sixth century. In reference to Ecclesiastes 10:6-8, the Targum describes the ascendance of Edom, i.e. Rome, without making any parallel reference to Ishmael or Islam. Furthermore, the Targum exhibits no use of Arabic loan words. This suggests that Targum Qohelet predates the Islamic conquest.⁵⁹⁶ As a result, Targum Qohelet probably dates to the seventh century⁵⁹⁷ with a composition date as early as approximately 600 CE.⁵⁹⁸ Hirshman, however, dates Targum Qohelet later.⁵⁹⁹ Variant manuscripts of Targum Qohelet are all fairly similar, indicating that the original was written in a Palestinian Aramaic, despite occasional features of eastern and Babylonian Aramaic, which are probably the result of scribal corrections.⁶⁰⁰

In its approach to Ecclesiastes, Targum Qohelet blends translation of the scriptural text into Aramaic with midrashic paraphrase. It essentially acts as a collection of midrashim that are used to translate the text paraphrastically.⁶⁰¹ Yet it still maintains the form of a translation, binding itself to the underlying text.⁶⁰² Targum Qohelet agrees closely with *Midrash Qohelet*

⁵⁹⁶ Peter S. Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 12-15.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁹⁸ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 30.

⁵⁹⁹ Hirshman, *מדרש קהלת רבה*, lvi.

⁶⁰⁰ Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet*, 3, 9.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2, 6.

⁶⁰² Alexander, “‘Translation and Midrash Completely Fused?’”, 84.

and material in the Babylonian Talmud.⁶⁰³ Given its interpretive tendencies, Targum Qohelet is far more digressive than the Targum to Kings, incorporating far more exegetical material. Its insistence on anchoring itself to the underlying text sets it apart from Targum Song of Songs and Targum Sheni to Esther, which are more free-flowing, as we shall soon see. Targum Qohelet's expansions beyond literal meaning are consonant with its literary goals.

The Targumist's goal is to clarify the meaning of Ecclesiastes while having it agree with normative rabbinic values by transforming problematic material to comply with rabbinic theology.⁶⁰⁴ Targum Qohelet describes the contents of Ecclesiastes in terms of Solomon's biography and within the context of Torah study. It systematically transforms Qohelet's generalized wisdom into rabbinically approved Torah wisdom in order to tone down the problematic aspects of the text's skepticism and heterodoxies.⁶⁰⁵ Such a project requires expansion and explanation diverging from the literal meaning of the text. In this sense, Targum Qohelet functions less as an Aramaic translation, and more like an exegetical interpretation of Ecclesiastes written in Aramaic.

Solomon looms large in the Targum's rendition of Ecclesiastes, taking on a more direct role than in the biblical original. Targum Qohelet casts Solomon as the author and narrator of Ecclesiastes. Like the midrashic tradition, Targum Qohelet relates much of the narrator's efforts

⁶⁰³ McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 327-328. Cf. Hirshman, *מדרש קהלת רבה*, cx. Hirshman sees the Targum's disparate approach to Ecclesiastes as evidence that *Midrash Qohelet* was probably not a source for Targum Qohelet.

⁶⁰⁴ Hirshman, *מדרש קהלת רבה*, lvi; Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet*, 2. In this sense, Hirshman sees Targum Qohelet as highly divergent from *Midrash Qohelet*, which Hirshman sees as more faithful to what the text of Ecclesiastes actually contemplates.

⁶⁰⁵ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 30.

to the accomplishments of Solomon's reign.⁶⁰⁶ In addition, Targum Qohelet consistently depicts Solomon as a prophet as evidenced by the very first verse: "The words of prophecy that Qohelet, who is Solomon, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, prophesied" (Tg. Qoh. 1:1). In this respect, Targum Qohelet parallels *Midrash Qohelet*, which also emphasizes Solomon's powers as a prophet. While the nature of this prophecy is generalized in *Midrash Qohelet*, the Targum expands these powers to encompass the broad ability to read future events.⁶⁰⁷ For example, the refrain of utter futility, הבל הבלים, functions as Solomon's response to the ultimate dissolution of the united monarchy, the destruction of the Temple, and the Babylonian exile, which he foresees through prophecy (Tg. Qoh. 1:2).⁶⁰⁸ The theme of Solomon as prophet is repeated numerous times throughout Targum Qohelet. This is accomplished through Solomon's own claims of being both a prophet and a king and is also bolstered by a third person "framing voice" that echoes these claims. Solomon's claim to prophecy, as well as his personal experience, grants him the authority to expound on ideal human behavior.⁶⁰⁹ His role as prophet also allows Solomon to speak of future events as the Targum often has him do.⁶¹⁰ As we have discussed, this marks a significant distinction between the targumim and midrashic literature.

While Targum Qohelet readily credits Solomon with prophecy and construes the content of Ecclesiastes to conform to rabbinic piety, it is not entirely apologetic in its treatment of Solomon. The Targum's rendering of verse 1:12 offers a prime example of this tendency. The

⁶⁰⁶ Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet*, 24-25.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 5; Hirshman, "נבואת שלמה ורוח הקודש במדרש קהלת רבה," 8-10.

⁶⁰⁸ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 92; Hirshman, *מדרש קהלת רבה*, lvi.

⁶⁰⁹ Philip Alexander, "Profile Targum Qohelet," *Aramaic Studies*, 9.1 (2011): 102-104; Alexander, "'Translation and Midrash Completely Fused?'" 91-92.

⁶¹⁰ Alexander, "'Translation and Midrash Completely Fused?'" 92.

original verse in Ecclesiastes states, “I am Qohelet; I was king over Israel in Jerusalem” (Eccl. 1:12). The Targum renders this short verse as follows:

When Solomon was king, he sat on the throne of his kingdom. His heart grew exceedingly proud of his crown, and he violated the decrees of the word of God. And he amassed many horses, chariots, and cavalrymen. And he collected exceedingly large amounts of silver and gold. And he married among foreign nations. Immediately, God’s anger burned against him, and He sent before him Ashmedai, king of the demons. And he banished him from the throne of his kingdom. And he took his signet from his hand since it was through this that he was exiled. And he was exiled in the world to rebuke him. And he would go around the towns of the districts and the towns of the land of Israel. He wept and cried for help, saying: I am Qohelet, whose name used to be called Solomon before this. I used to be king over Israel in Jerusalem (Tg. Qoh. 1:12).

Here, as with the rabbinic midrashic tradition, the Targumist attributes Solomon’s sins to pride and renders his wisdom subordinate to Torah understanding.⁶¹¹ However, the Targum also discusses Solomon’s systematic violation of the kingly prohibitions in Deuteronomy 17. It then brings Ashmedai and Solomon’s forced humility into the story before finally returning to the underlying language of the verse. The Targum incorporates multiple midrashic traditions in its exposition of the verse, packing them into a single concise narrative surveying Solomon’s sins, his punishment, and his subsequent humiliation that will allow for his redemption.

Similarly, in verse 12:10, the Targumist criticizes Solomon for employing psychology in judgment rather than following the halakhic procedural requirements of hearing witness testimony (Deut. 19:15):

King Solomon, who is called Qohelet, sought in his wisdom to judge judgments according to the thoughts of the hearts of men and not with witnesses. For this it was said to him through the spirit of prophecy from before the Lord: This has already been

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 88; Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet*, 22.

written in the Torah scroll by the hands of Moses, the teacher of Israel, right and true words: upon the words of witnesses will the matter be established (Tg. Qoh. 12:10).

The Targumist has a prophetic spirit chastise Solomon for failing to subjugate his wisdom to Torah law. While this prophetic spirit reprimands Solomon, the fact that it is prophetic bolsters his identity as a prophet. The Targum's elevation of Torah knowledge over human wisdom may have been the Targumist's response to those Jews more interested in Greek philosophy than Torah learning. Or it may have served to correct the theological problems posed by Qohelet's words.⁶¹² In this sense, Targum Qohelet continues the response of the rabbis to Ecclesiastes. Both presume that Solomon was the author of Ecclesiastes and that he wrote it through divine inspiration. Targum Qohelet raises the stakes by crediting Solomon with full-fledged prophecy. As such, both the midrashim and the Targum are forced to read Ecclesiastes as the word of God, and, as a result, both must reinterpret the words of Qohelet in a way that reflects Torah and rabbinic piety. Like the rabbis of late antiquity, the Targumist cannot read Ecclesiastes as intentionally critical of Solomon in purpose, that understanding being long lost to history. However, having declared Ecclesiastes the product of prophecy, the Targum is still willing to use its text to criticize Solomon. Thus, Targum Qohelet exhibits an interesting contrast between its willingness to critique Solomon and its elevation of Solomon to the level of prophet. Perhaps the Targumist justified these contradictions by presuming that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes after his humbling experience with Ashmedai, as suggested by the Targum's rendering of verse 1:12. However, nothing in the Targum expressly attempts to address this dissonance. Targum Song of Songs, on the other hand, will face no such dilemmas.

⁶¹² Alexander, "Translation and Midrash Completely Fused?" 85-86, 88.

5.4 Targum Song of Songs

Targum Song of Song dates a little after Targum Qohelet. It exhibits Aramaic elements from a variety of disparate sources, suggesting that it is a deliberate pastiche of a number of styles for literary reasons.⁶¹³ The Targum also features some Arabic loanwords, suggesting that the author may have been an Arabic speaker. If so, this means that Targum Song of Songs was written sometime in the eighth through ninth centuries at a time when Arabic had supplanted Aramaic as the vernacular for Jews in the Middle East, but before they began to translate biblical literature into Arabic. The Targum's emphasis on the Exodus may reflect that by the time it was written, the Song of Songs was already part of the Passover liturgy, a practice that was instituted during the geonic period. Furthermore, the Targum's messianic themes are consistent with an apocalyptic revival that occurred within Judaism during the seventh and eighth centuries, which paralleled similar ideas current in Christianity at the same time, possibly in response to the rise of Islam.⁶¹⁴

Such a dating allows for the possibility that Targum Song of Songs was written roughly contemporaneously with *Song of Songs Rabbah*. Both texts share the conceit of reading the Song as a love story between Israel and God, and both apply the Song to Israel's history. However, the Targum distinguishes itself by doing so with an unerring consistency absent in the midrash.⁶¹⁵ Most of the early rabbinic readings of the Song of Songs are varied and fragmentary.

⁶¹³ Or it could represent the lapse of Aramaic as a spoken language, with the Targumist attempting to recreate a literary Aramaic from a number of disparate sources.

⁶¹⁴ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 8-12, 55-57; Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 40, 43, 45-46, 84; McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 324-326.

⁶¹⁵ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 35-36; Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 84-85, 220-221. Alexander expands the potential composition dates of *Song of Songs Rabbah* to the sixth through eighth centuries (56).

Rabbinic references to the Song appear most often in the form of prooftexts used to support other propositions, often halakhic. Thus, while the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs as depicting the love between God and Israel appears in the rabbinic literature, it is not consistently asserted. Targum Song of Songs, on the other hand, never veers from this literary conceit.⁶¹⁶

Like Targum Qohelet, Targum Song of Songs incorporates a variety of midrashic material. Its liberal use of paraphrase removes it from the realm of more faithful translations. However, it never abandons the form of an Aramaic Targum, in the sense that its Aramaic interpretation runs alongside the scriptural text verse by verse. About ninety percent or more of Targum Song of Songs has parallels with material in other rabbinic literature. However, this does not mean that Targum Song of Songs is wholly derivative. It is impossible to determine whether the Targum relies on existing midrashic works, or whether it feeds on earlier sources shared by the midrashim. Despite its liberal use of midrashic traditions, however, Targum Song of Songs does not merely regurgitate preexisting material. Rather, the Targumist chose only those traditions that served his exegetical purposes. Furthermore, he finesses these traditions for his exegetical aims, imposing his own mark of originality.⁶¹⁷ The Targum is further distinguished from midrash in its failure to adopt the midrashic conventions of sharing multiple opinions, citing authorities, or citing scriptural prooftexts. There is plenty of material in *Song of Songs Rabbah* that Targum Song of Songs does not reference or incorporate. At the same time, there are rabbinic traditions that appear in both *Song of Songs Rabbah* and the Targum that also appear in other midrashic sources. Thus, there is no proof that there is any direct literary

⁶¹⁶ Carr, "Song of Songs as a Microcosm," 174-175.

⁶¹⁷ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 29, 31; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 321-323, 330; Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 217, 223.

dependence between Targum Song of Songs and *Song of Songs Rabbah*, although they may very well derive traditions from a common source.⁶¹⁸

The Targum's paraphrastic, interpretive approach makes it five times longer than the Song itself. Clearly, the Targumist's goal was not to provide a straight Aramaic translation, but to convey the meaning of the text as he saw it. The controversial nature of the underlying biblical text demands greater interpretation than most biblical texts.⁶¹⁹ Thus, while both Targum Qohelet and Targum Song of Songs are paraphrastic and incorporate midrashic material, Targum Song of Songs is significantly more expressive, with more elaborate exegetical interpretations of each verse. In addition, Targum Song of Songs binds itself less tightly to the underlying language of the scriptural verses than does Targum Qohelet. This frees the Targumist to pursue his allegorical treatment of the Song with greater consistency.

This consistency reveals that Targum Song of Songs is the thematically unified product of a single author. According to Alexander, this makes it unique among all midrashim and targumim. Targum Song of Songs consistently reads the Song of Songs as an account of Israel's prophetically revealed history from the exodus from Egypt until the messianic age.⁶²⁰ As with earlier rabbinic exegesis, the Targum renders the male figure of the Song as God, while the female persona represents Israel. However, the Targum's application of this framework to a consistent history of that relationship from the exodus until the messianic age is unique to

⁶¹⁸ Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 27, 29, 50-51, 186-187.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-49.

⁶²⁰ Philip Alexander, "Profile Targum Canticles," *Aramaic Studies*, 9.1 (2011): 116-117; Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory," 23; Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, xi, 13; Philip S. Alexander, "Textual Criticism and Rabbinic Literature: The Case of Targum of the Song of Songs," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 75.3 (1993): 172; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 332, 334-336; Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 52, 222; McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 324-325.

Targum Song of Songs.⁶²¹ Allegorical readings of the Song of Songs are almost as old as the Song itself. While allegory does tame the book's frank eroticism, an allegorical reading is not necessarily the product of discomfort with the source material.⁶²² In practice, Targum Song of Songs subverts the Song's overt sensuality by recasting its metaphoric descriptions of the young lovers' physical beauty with metaphors about the spiritual traits of God and Israel.⁶²³ However, this recasting of the woman as Israel and the man as God was already a longstanding traditional reading reflected in rabbinic literature. Furthermore, like midrashic literature, the Targumist also had the biblical precedent that appears in the prophetic literature in which Israel is likened to God's bride or wayward wife.⁶²⁴

What makes the Targum's use of this treatment unique is its application to Israel's history. The separations and reunions of the two young lovers are applied to Israel's history as a series of estrangements and reconciliations with God. The Targum divides this history into three periods: 1) from the Exodus and conquest of the land until the building of the first Temple, 2) from the Babylonian exile, return to the land, and the building of the second Temple, and 3) from Roman exile until the coming of Messiah and the building of the third Temple. In so doing, the Targum draws parallels that cut across these three periods. Egypt, Babylon, and Edom (Rome) form parallel exiles. Moses, Cyrus, and the Messiah operate as parallel redeemers. Solomon, the Hasmoneans, and the Messiah become parallel Temple builders. This division into multiple time periods allows the Targumist to account for many of the repetitions that appear in the text of the

⁶²¹ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, xi, 13.

⁶²² Barton, "Canonicity of the Song of Songs," 5.

⁶²³ Yona Sabar, *Targum de-Targum: An Old Neo-Aramaic Version of the Targum on Song of Songs* (Wiesbaden, Ger.: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), 13.

⁶²⁴ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 27.

Song of Songs.⁶²⁵ While this historical allegory may stray radically from the original intent of the Song, a literal translation of the Song of Songs, with its depictions of young love and pastoral beauty, would not have suited the more somber needs and mood of Diaspora Jewry. The Targumist's rendition of Jewish history may highlight Israel's past glories, but it also acknowledges its setbacks. The Targumist's message is one of hope. He seeks to reassure the Jews of the exile that God's love for them has never ceased and will remain eternal, culminating in the messianic age.⁶²⁶

Solomon plays a major role in Targum Song of Songs. Solomon serves as the real-time narrator, reciting Israel's history and foretelling its future through prophetic inspiration. Thus, the Targum opens by introducing the Song of Songs as "Songs and praises that the prophet Solomon, king of Israel, said through the spirit of prophecy before the Master of the entire world, the Lord..." (Tg. Song 1:1).⁶²⁷ In this opening verse, the Targumist stresses Solomon's role as a prophet and his composition of the Song through divine inspiration to rebut any doubt to the contrary. The Targumist reiterates Solomon's role as a prophet in verse 1:17, in which Solomon praises his own Temple as well as the Temple that will be built in messianic times. This bolsters Solomon's role as a prophet while locating the narrative in Solomon's time.⁶²⁸ While the Targumist portrays the material contained within the Song of Songs as Solomon's prophecy, the Targumist maintains Solomon's role as a third person narrator, never allowing Solomon to adopt

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 13, 28; Alexander, "Profile Targum Canticles," 117; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 333.

⁶²⁶ Sabar, *Targum de-Targum*, 11, 14.

⁶²⁷ Alexander, "Profile Targum Canticles," 117; Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 85; Alexander, "'Translation and Midrash Completely Fused?'" 95.

⁶²⁸ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 95, fn. 129.

first person narration.⁶²⁹ In this way, to the extent that Solomon is the author, he acts more like a playwright, composing dialogue for his characters, one of whom is Solomon himself.⁶³⁰

Solomon's role in the Targum, however, is not limited to that of third person narrator. While the first historic period (Tg. Song 1:3-5:1), from the exodus until the first Temple, devotes much attention to Israel's experience in the wilderness, the Targum also focuses on the time of Solomon's reign (Tg. Song 3:5-5:1). Unlike some midrashic traditions, the Targumist does not attempt to write Solomon out of the Song of Songs. Where the Song of Songs refers to Solomon in the third person (1:1, 1:5, 3:7, 3:9, 3:11, 8:11-12), the Targumist consistently reads these mentions as referring to Solomon himself, never as an allegory for God. And the image of this Solomon is quite positive. The Targumist's description of the building of Solomon's Temple echoes his material regarding the building of the Tabernacle, creating a parallel between Solomon and Moses. It is within the description of Solomon's reign that the Targum depicts Israel in its ideal state, living in harmony under Torah rule (Tg. Song 4:1-15). In verse 7:5, the Targum credits Solomon with bringing the people of Israel under the rule of Torah law and the sovereignty of God. The Targumist depicts the Sanhedrin as active during Solomon's time helping to create this ideal state. For the Targumist, as Alexander argues, "Israel as a polity reached perfection in Solomon's reign."⁶³¹

Just how much the Targumist idealizes Solomon is the subject of some debate.

Alexander describes how Solomon casts a shadow over the other two historic periods. The Hasmoneans, in the second historical period (Tg. Song 5:2-7:11), are described as reestablishing

⁶²⁹ Alexander, "Profile Targum Canticles," 118.

⁶³⁰ Alexander, "'Translation and Midrash Completely Fused?'" 94.

⁶³¹ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 16; 22; 123, fn. 34; 126, fn. 47; 128, fn. 57; 179, fn. 24; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 333.

the Solomonic polity. This move by the Targumist is unusual in rabbinic literature. The rabbis, for the most part, denigrated the Hasmoneans for their accretion of power, combining the kingship with the priesthood, as well as for the subsequent corruption and Hellenization of their leaders. While the Targumist admires the Hasmoneans, they do not attain the level of perfection embodied by Solomon and his Temple.⁶³² Penelope Junkermann, on the other hand, reads the three periods as a continuous progression. Thus, the Hasmoneans reach a greater level of perfection than Solomon, while the Messiah will outperform them both.⁶³³ While Alexander agrees that the messianic age will bring true perfection, he sees it more as a return to the age of Solomon. In the same way that he views the Hasmoneans, the Targumist views the messianic age of the third historic period (Tg. Song 7:12-8:12) as a return to the perfection of the Solomonic age. However, the Messiah will restore Israel to complete perfection as embodied in the first Temple, as opposed to the imperfection of the second Temple. Targum Song of Songs ends with Solomon's discussion of the end of days and his direct exhortation to Israel to pray for the Messiah (Tg. Song 8:13-14).⁶³⁴

Given this glowing image of Solomonic perfection, it is little surprise that Targum Song of Songs engages in Solomonic apologetics. The Targum does address the split of the kingdom after Solomon's death in its exposition of verses 8:11-12, which deal with Solomon's vineyard. The Targum deals with these verses using the future tense, because from Solomon's perspective, the split of the kingdom has not yet occurred. The one thousand pieces of silver refer to the ten tribes that will ultimately secede from the kingdom. However, Solomon can keep the thousand,

⁶³² Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 16-18; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 333.

⁶³³ Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 54.

⁶³⁴ Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 18.

while Rehoboam will keep only two hundred, that is, the remaining two tribes.⁶³⁵ The Targum never addresses why the kingdom will be split, only reflecting that its split is foretold to Solomon through the prophecy of Ahijah. However, the Targumist does portray Solomon as reacting very poorly to this news and wanting to kill Ahijah, who is forced to flee, until Solomon receives his own prophecy assuring him that the split in the kingdom will not come until after his death (Tg. Song 8:12). The Targum makes no mention of Solomon's sins being the catalyst for the split. Thus, Solomon's reaction to Ahijah's prophecy is seen less as sinful and more as an emotional reaction to bad news that will affect the entire people of Israel.

The Targum's depiction of Solomon thus harkens back to his depiction in Chronicles. As in Chronicles, the Solomon of Targum Song of Songs represents a cleansed ideal. There is no mention of Solomon's sins. The Targum does not engage in outright apologetics because it never addresses his faults in the first place. Like Chronicles, much of this treatment stems from Targum Song of Songs' idealized view of the Temple. The Targum focuses on the Tabernacle, the first Temple, and the second Temple as parallels that create a binding theme within the text. The ultimate redemption will be further marked by a third Temple built by the Messiah. However, the Targumist does not focus solely on Temples. The Targumist is also very much concerned with the cycle of exile and redemption. For the Targumist, redemption is marked not only by the presence of the Temple, but also by Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. For this reason, the Targumist can laud the Hasmoneans, who did not build the second Temple, but were responsible for reestablishing Jewish sovereignty in Judah. In this sense, Solomon occupies a unique place in history. He reigned over the united Israelite kingdom at a time when the Temple

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 201-202; 202, fn. 51; Leon J. Liebreich, "Midrash Lekah Tob's Dependence upon Targum to the Song of Songs 8:11-12," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 38, no. 1 (Jul. 1947): 63-64.

stood. For the Targumist, this is the ideal to which his messianic aspirations seek to return. The Targum's message is one of hope directed at a Jewish audience that has spent centuries in exile. The Targumist is not interested in Solomon's sins. Rather, he is interested in returning to the idealized vision of Jewish sovereignty and reestablishment of the Temple that Solomon's reign represents.

The Targum's adoption of a consistently applied allegorical reading puts it closer in line with Christian readings of the Song of that time than it does with rabbinic readings of the Song, which were more atomistic. This alignment of approaches may suggest a hidden dialectic with Christian readings of the Song of Songs.⁶³⁶ The Targum's consistent and systematic reading of the Song of Songs as an allegory about the love between God and Israel may have come as a response to Christian readings of the Song.⁶³⁷ For example, we have already discussed Origen's famous interpretation of the Song of Songs as an allegory for the marriage of Jesus or the word of God, represented by the bridegroom, to the Church or the soul, represented by the bride (Origen, Song of Songs, introduction). Hirshman describes how Origen's interpretive framework drew on Jewish mystical responses to the Song.⁶³⁸ This interpretive strategy remained a dominant mode of Christian reading of the Song into the Middle Ages. Targum Song of Songs' allegory is similar in that it also casts the Song's relationship as one between God and Israel. Thus, the Targum to the Song of Songs, in framing its allegorical approach to the Song, may have drawn on Christian sources, which in turn may have drawn upon earlier Jewish traditions. However, the Targum extends the metaphor by applying it to the history of Israel. In

⁶³⁶ Junkermann, "The Relationship between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs," 223-224.

⁶³⁷ Carr, "Song of Songs as a Microcosm," 177.

⁶³⁸ Hirshman, *Rivalry of Genius*, 86-89.

truth, it is impossible to determine how much the Targumist was influenced by Christian allegorical readings of the Song. The Targumist may have simply been inspired by midrashic uses of the same God-Israel allegory, which emerges very early in the prophetic works of Tanakh. Regardless of original intent, the Targum does seem to function as a rejoinder to Christian allegorical interpretation of the Song. Ironically, the Targum would ultimately influence medieval Christian readings of the Song of Songs, as we shall see in our discussion of the Song in the Middle Ages.

A large number of variant manuscripts, over sixty, exist for Targum Song of Songs, about as many as exist for Targum Onqelos on the Torah. In contrast, there are only four or so extant manuscripts of *Song of Songs Rabbah*. This large number of manuscripts attests to the Targum's popularity, as it was copied and recopied for broader dissemination. According to Alexander, Targum Song of Songs was one of the most popular religious texts of the Jewish Middle Ages, translated into Ladino, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Persian, and Neo-Aramaic. Furthermore, Targum Song of Songs had a pronounced influence on subsequent Jewish exegesis. Its mark can be seen in pseudo-Saadia of the tenth century as well as in the medieval midrashic collection *Midrash Lekah Tov* of the eleventh through twelfth centuries. Even more significant is the Targum's influence on Rashi's commentary to the Song of Songs. Rashi relies on the Targum's interpretive framework for his own commentary, and he often does little more than summarize or paraphrase the Targum. The Targum may have influenced a portion of Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary as well. The exegetical approach of the Targum dominated Jewish understanding of

Song of Songs until the more philosophical and mystical Jewish schools of thought became ascendant in the late Middle Ages.⁶³⁹

Solomon became a very popular figure in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.⁶⁴⁰ The popularity of Targum Song of Songs may have had much to do with this. This final point is of primary significance for our understanding of how Jewish perceptions of Solomon change in the Middle Ages. Up until this point, with the solitary exception of the book of Chronicles, we see Jewish responses to Solomon as either solidly critical or mixed. We have read both Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs as critical texts on Solomon. Rabbinic literature, which loses this understanding of those works, still reflects a mixture of responses to Solomon. However, even its apologetic traditions seek to mitigate the severity of Solomon's sins, thereby acknowledging them in the first place. Only rarely do rabbinic treatments of Solomon laud him in an uncritical fashion in the way that Chronicles does. Even the rest of targumic literature, which credits Solomon with prophecy, acknowledges his sins and is willing to criticize him for them. This exegetical mix of responses remains true until we reach Targum Song of Songs. This targum, which operates as a consistent work with a specific historical vision, harkens back to Chronicles in its approach to Solomon. No doubt, its popularity in the Middle Ages was due in part to its hope for future redemption from exile. But this popularity would also influence the way Song of Songs and Solomon were understood in the Middle Ages.

⁶³⁹ Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory," 23; Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, 45-46; Alexander, "Textual Criticism and Rabbinic Literature," 163-164; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 318-319, 336-337; Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 74; Liebreich, "Midrash Lekah Tob's Dependence," 64-66; McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 323; Sabar, *Targum de-Targum*, 7, 14-15.

⁶⁴⁰ Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 2.

5.5 Targum Sheni and Solomon in Islam

Finally, we turn to the treatment of Solomon in the Targum to the Book of Esther. There are two targumim to Esther commonly identified as Targum Rishon (“first”) and Targum Sheni (“second”). The latter tends to be more paraphrastic and incorporates more midrashic material than the former. Targum Sheni shares midrashic material with *b. Megillah* and *Esther Rabbah*. However, as is so often the case with targumim, the relationship between these disparate texts is unclear, and it cannot be determined whether the Targum draws upon material from the Talmud or midrash, or vice versa, or whether they all share a common source. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Targum Sheni to Esther has proven extremely difficult to date. Scholars have dated its composition anywhere from the fourth century to the eleventh century.⁶⁴¹

The Targum Sheni, despite its focus on the Book of Esther, is relevant to our discussion because it devotes a portion of its introductory material to Solomon. The Targum’s discussion of the first two verses of Esther is extraordinarily long and includes extended midrashic traditions regarding Solomon. King Ahasuerus is compared to Solomon in the Targum’s rendering of Esther 1:1-2 since Ahasuerus is said to have ruled a large kingdom and enjoyed tremendous wealth, including luxuries from other realms. However, Ahasuerus falls short of Solomon’s glory as he does not rule the entire world and is unable to mount Solomon’s magnificent mechanical throne, forcing him to produce a facsimile.⁶⁴²

Like that of Targum Song of Songs, Targum Sheni’s portrait of Solomon is markedly positive. God chooses Solomon to reign even before his birth. God reveals to Solomon secrets and mysteries. Solomon has the ability to discern the guilt and innocence of the litigants he

⁶⁴¹ Bernard Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther: Translated, with Apparatus and Notes* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 8, 14-15, 20.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 101, fn. 4.

judges. In sharp contrast to *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:10, the Targum construes a number of Solomon's names in a positive light, including Itiel, God supported him, and Yaqa, he was the ruler over all people. Solomon has command over demons and evil spirits. He writes parables that address mysteries and the secrets of nature. Solomon is described as perfect, honest, shunning evil, and understanding mysteries. He understands the language of birds and animals. His righteousness affords him reign over both this world and the world to come (Tg. Sheni 1:2).⁶⁴³ In this respect, Targum Sheni's treatment of Solomon is rather distinct from midrashic and the rest of targumic literature. Targum Sheni fully embraces and celebrates the esoteric Solomon and his magical powers.

Targum Sheni's conferring of mastery over animals, birds, demons, and spirits culminates in Solomon's commanding an army comprising animals, birds, and demons.⁶⁴⁴ Solomon summons these animals in the context of a banquet after Solomon had become cheerful from drink and wished to impress the other kings in attendance.⁶⁴⁵ After gathering all of these creatures, Solomon notices that the hoopoe or wild rooster has failed to appear. When the rooster finally arrives, it reports to Solomon about the kingdom of Sheba, which is wealthy but incapable of waging war and is ruled by a queen. Solomon invites the Queen of Sheba to visit him. She does so, posing multiple riddles to him, which he is able to successfully answer (Tg.

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 104-107.

⁶⁴⁴ Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 14-15; Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther*, 114; Wessels, *The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an*, 135-136.

⁶⁴⁵ Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther*, 117, fn. 37. This detail creates another literary parallel linking Solomon with Ahasuerus, who attends several drinking parties over the course of the Book of Esther. At his own party, Ahasuerus also becomes cheerful with wine and wishes to impress his guests. However, he attempts to do so by parading his wife Vashti before them (Est. 1:10-11).

Sheni 1:2).⁶⁴⁶ Jacob Lassner theorizes that the riddles all touch upon gender identity and the blurring of gender roles, a theme that is raised by the queen's position as a female monarch. Solomon restores the natural order by solving the riddles and reasserting male authority.⁶⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that Targum Sheni's portrayal of Solomon uncritically rests in large part on his special knowledge. Solomon can communicate with animals and summon them. Solomon can summon and control demons as well. Solomon uses his special knowledge to outwit the Queen of Sheba, which the Targum applauds.

The Qur'an also discusses Solomon, and its treatment of Solomon bears some striking parallels to his depiction in Targum Sheni. The Qur'an's treatment of Solomon, in keeping with its treatment of other biblical figures, does not engage his biblical sources but rather engages with popular conceptions of Solomon. This explains why the Qur'anic treatment of Solomon, and other biblical and historic figures for that matter, is often so disjointed and lacking in a sustained structure. The Qur'an presumes its audience's familiarity with Solomon and other biblical figures from popular folklore.⁶⁴⁸ However, the Qur'an repurposes these legends for Islamic ends. As Lassner notes, "Absorbing biblical and postbiblical themes, Muslims refashioned the Jewish past and made it part of their own historic experiences and world view." This absorption and refashioning helped Muslims to define their own "self" as well as the "other."⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther*, 114-115, 117.

⁶⁴⁷ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 34-35.

⁶⁴⁸ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 45; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Solomon and Mythic Kingship in the Arab-Islamic Tradition: Qaṣīdah, Qur'ān and Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 48 (2017): 4, 15, 32-33.

⁶⁴⁹ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 5.

The Qur'an devotes special attention to the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon in an extended treatment in surah 27 that in many respects parallels the version of the story in Targum Sheni.⁶⁵⁰ It shares Solomon's gathering an army of birds, animals, and spirits (Q 27:17). It describes the missing hoopoe, who returns to report about Sheba (Q 27:20-23). However, there are a number of points of departure. The Qur'an downplays the queen's sovereignty, perhaps out of discomfort with a female ruler.⁶⁵¹ Instead of the queen posing riddles to Solomon, it is Solomon who tests the queen. Instead of exacting tribute, Solomon demands the queen submit to God.⁶⁵² This change is consistent with the primary purpose of the Qur'an, which is to promote fealty to God. Thus, the Qur'an's version of the Queen of Sheba narrative focuses on the message of salvation through submission to God and emphasizes the queen's submission to Islam. Solomon serves as a proxy for Islam, which plays upon his name, so that the queen's submission to Solomon represents her submission to Islam and by extension to God.⁶⁵³ The precise relationship between the Qur'an's Queen of Sheba narrative and the version in Targum Sheni remains unclear, especially given the lack of consensus on the dating of the Targum. However, even if the Targum Sheni was composed later, the traditions contained within the Targum may be much older, easily predating Islam. Of course, this exchange of culture works both ways, and Jews were highly influenced by Islam in the fields of philosophy, mysticism,

⁶⁵⁰ Janssens, "The Ikhwān Aṣ-Ṣafā'," 246; Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 39; Wessels, *The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an*, 135-136.

⁶⁵¹ Wessels, *The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an*, 135-136.

⁶⁵² Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 39.

⁶⁵³ Stetkevych, "Solomon and Mythic Kingship," 14, 32, 34-35.

poetry, science, and language. Thus, legends about Solomon could have reentered Jewish lore via Islam.⁶⁵⁴

The Queen of Sheba narrative is not the Qur'an's only treatment of Solomon. In general, the Qur'an presents a highly adulatory image of Solomon. However, it does address his accumulation of horses:

We gave Solomon to David; and he was a good and faithful servant. When, one evening, his prancing steeds were ranged before him, he said: 'My love for good things has distracted me from the remembrance of my Lord; for now the sun has vanished behind the veil of darkness. Bring me back my chargers!' And with this he fell to hacking their legs and necks (Q 38:30-33).⁶⁵⁵

For the Qur'an, horses represent worldly goods that distract from God (Q 38:32). Ultimately, Solomon repents by sacrificing his horses (Q 38:33).⁶⁵⁶ Solomon's repentance is significant for the Qur'an's message. Solomon is a prototype of Muhammad. Therefore, he must serve as a model for Islamic rulers. The absolute rule of the Islamic ruler is justified by his righteousness and his willingness to forego his passions in favor of fealty to God.⁶⁵⁷

This Islamification of Solomon is furthered in later Islamic treatments of Solomon. In the *Stories of the Prophet*, exegetical works by various Islamic commentators, Solomon immediately travels to Mecca after completing the Temple and prophesies regarding Muhammad's future role as the seal of prophecy.⁶⁵⁸ This wholly positive view of Solomon is

⁶⁵⁴ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 47, 129, 135-136. See also, Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham*, 226-227, fns. 27-28, which discusses cross-cultural intertextuality between Judaism and Islam and how shared traditions function as dialectic intercourse rather than simply as borrowing from earlier sources.

⁶⁵⁵ Translation from *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 319.

⁶⁵⁶ Stetkevych, "Solomon and Mythic Kingship," 18, 22; Wessels, *The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an*, 141.

⁶⁵⁷ Stetkevych, "Solomon and Mythic Kingship," 25-26.

⁶⁵⁸ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 117-119. Lassner cites the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* of al-Tha'labī.

consistent with Islamic portrayals of its prophets. While prophets are human and imperfect, they are nonetheless viewed as righteous and protected from sin. Their prophecy imbues them with a certain degree of infallibility. Thus, it is unthinkable that a prophet like Solomon could ever commit idolatry.⁶⁵⁹ While Jewish sources do not share quite such a stark view of prophetic infallibility, the sense that a prophet could not commit idolatry seems to be shared with many of the Jewish medieval exegetes, as we shall see.

The Qur'an also echoes legends regarding Solomon's descent from the throne and replacement with an imposter: "We put Solomon to the proof and placed a counterfeit upon his throne, so that he at length repented. He said: 'Forgive me, Lord, and bestow upon me such power as shall belong to none after me. You are the Bountiful Giver'" (Q 38:34-35).⁶⁶⁰ In the Qur'anic version as well as in popular Islamic accounts, Solomon repents and returns to the throne. In one later Islamic account, Solomon is replaced by the demon Şakhr who deposes Solomon by gaining control of his signet ring. Şakhr bears obvious parallels with Ashmedai.⁶⁶¹ However, unlike the Ashmedai narrative in the Talmud, the Qur'an embraces Solomon's dominion over demons, viewing it as a divine gift. In contrast, *b. Gittin* 68a-68b criticizes Solomon for his ventures into the demonic realm. We saw that the rabbis fairly consistently attempted to downplay the esoteric Solomon in favor of a Solomon who adhered to rabbinic

⁶⁵⁹ 'Umar S. al-Ashqar, *The Messengers and the Messages in the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khaltab (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2005), 147-149, 159. This particular source, produced in Saudi Arabia, presumably represents official state-sponsored Wahhabi beliefs. It certainly expresses some rather unfortunate attitudes regarding Jews and Christians. However, its understanding about the infallibility of prophets is consistent with the Qur'anic depiction of its prophets and helps explain Islamic attitude toward biblical figures.

⁶⁶⁰ Translation from *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood, 319.

⁶⁶¹ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 103; Stetkevych, "Solomon and Mythic Kingship," 22-23. Stetkevych cites the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā* (Stories of the Prophet) of al-Fārisī for the story of Solomon's being deposed by a demon.

values. Targum Sheni seems to stand apart from that rabbinic position and finds itself more aligned with Islamic views of Solomon.

Lassner notes that later Islamic writings seem more comfortable with postbiblical Jewish traditions. Muslim scholars viewed Jewish Scripture as either inspired, in which case it could be used to foretell the coming of Muhammad, or as corrupt and less reliable. How and why Muslim writers came into contact with Jewish legends is unclear, but later Islamic writings “are sprinkled with material that has been channeled through post-biblical Jewish sources, and so various prophetic tales of Islam can be more richly understood as adaptations of familiar Jewish themes and stories.” While some of these traditions may have entered Islam through Jewish converts or Muslim interactions with practicing Jews, Lassner sees it more likely that these traditions were accessed from oral folklore that permeated the Near East.⁶⁶² Similarly, the portrayal of Solomon in Targum Sheni seems to reflect a more popular image of Solomon than the midrashic traditions and other targumic treatments we have examined. The midrashim, for the most part, address esoteric elements of Solomon’s character but seek to downplay them or cast them as dangerous and inferior to rabbinic wisdom. The other targumim we have examined grant Solomon prophetic powers but steer clear of esotericism. In this sense, Targum Sheni is fairly unique in Jewish exegetical literature given its uncritical portrayal of Solomon’s magical powers. Rather, it shares an affinity with Islamic approaches to Solomon albeit without the specifically Islamic purpose expressed in the Qur’an’s adaptation of Solomon.

This returns us to the tension between the esoteric, magical Solomon of popular lore and Solomon as he is portrayed in Tanakh and in rabbinic literature. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych argues that culturally, the genuine Solomon is not the Solomon of scriptural texts but rather the

⁶⁶² Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 121-127.

Solomon of popular imagination. Religious texts repurpose Solomon for ideological, religious, or political reasons.⁶⁶³ It is not clear that anyone can convincingly claim that any particular portrayal of Solomon is the “genuine” one. However, our focus is on exegetical treatments of Solomon, not Solomon in popular legend and folklore, except to the extent that the esoteric Solomon of popular imagination emerges and is preserved in the exegetical literature. Even where exegetical materials embrace more esoteric notions of Solomon, they ultimately remain grounded in the scriptural sources they seek to interpret. Folklore, on the other hand, reflects popular imagination. While it may take its initial inspiration from scriptural sources, it does not remain bound to Scripture. Thus, even fanciful aggadic midrash or targumim that veer broadly from their source text still view their purpose as explicating Tanakh and not merely engaging in popular tales regarding biblical personalities. As such, we can distinguish between Jewish exegesis, as opposed to popular perception, and the scriptural and exegetical responses of Christianity and Islam. We have seen how Christian sources embraced the esoteric Solomon. Islam follows a similar path.

In the Qur’an, God gives special kingship and knowledge to Solomon (Q 21:79, 27:15, 38:35). This special knowledge God grants Solomon includes the ability to command the winds (Q 21:81, 34:12, 38:36) and to understand animals, including ants (Q 27:18-19) and birds (Q 21:79, 27:16, 38:36).⁶⁶⁴ The Qur’an preserves Solomon’s reputation as a builder but has God help Solomon with wind, copper, and jinn (Q 34:12-13).⁶⁶⁵ Islamic treatments of Solomon

⁶⁶³ Stetkevych, “Solomon and Mythic Kingship,” 3.

⁶⁶⁴ Wessels, *The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an*, 131-132.

⁶⁶⁵ Stetkevych, “Solomon and Mythic Kingship,” 11.

center on the esoteric Solomon. This is even clearer in Islamic exegetical materials.⁶⁶⁶ The Stories of the Prophet amplify Solomon's esoteric powers. For example, Solomon uses the signet ring given to him by God to command dark forces.⁶⁶⁷ Similarly, Janssens discusses a tenth or eleventh century work by "the Brethren of Purity" in Iraq that further develops Solomon's magical qualities in its exegetical discussion of Solomon in the Qur'an. Their Solomon is mystical, righteous, other-worldly, and thoroughly esoteric.⁶⁶⁸ As Lassner notes, the esoteric element of Solomon's character "draws considerable attention in both Jewish and Muslim writings and is among the most ubiquitous themes of the extensive and much-coveted Solomonic folklore."⁶⁶⁹ Hence, we see that Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sources, both scriptural and exegetical, engage in a shared system of literary development, with themes that appear and reappear in all three religions' responses to Solomon. Thus, in this milieu, it becomes extremely difficult to discuss a notion of cross-cultural borrowing or even direct influence from one religion to another.

However, we can note distinct reactions to these shared traditions. In Jewish exegetical material, the rabbis have mostly downplayed the esoteric Solomon. Targum Sheni seems to be an exception. The rabbinic attempt to quell Solomon's magical reputation sets rabbinic exegesis in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages apart from Christian and Islamic beliefs about Solomon. This move also preserves a more critical attitude toward Solomon among Jewish sources. While medieval Jewish sources experience a degree of greater difficulty in condemning

⁶⁶⁶ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 66-67.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁶⁸ Janssens, "The Ikhwān Aṣ-Ṣafā'," 251-252.

⁶⁶⁹ Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 66.

Solomon, they still manage to acknowledge his sins and confront them. Any apologetic tendencies exhibited by Jewish commentators in the Middle Ages are not as a result of Solomon's esoteric reputation. It is interesting to note, however, that the targumic literature tends to take a more apologetic view of Solomon. In addition to more readily conferring prophecy on him, the targumim, especially Targum Song of Songs and Targum Sheni, view Solomon in a more positive light altogether. While we have pondered the literary relationship between midrashic literature and the targumim, we can also see that despite drawing on shared traditions, these works draw different conclusions and disparate views of Solomon. This might suggest that the method of production of midrashim and targumim was different. Perhaps they represent the literary production of disparate groups of Jews. We know that the midrashim are rabbinic works, but we know little about the origins of the targumim. They may represent more popular exegetical responses to Tanakh. Targum Sheni's embracing of the esoteric Solomon seems to support this conclusion. There may be no practical way to determine the targumic milieu, but it would certainly be an interesting subject of further research.

CHAPTER SIX: SOLOMON IN THE MIDDLE AGES

6.1 Introduction to Medieval Commentary

Medieval Jewish exegesis distinguishes itself from rabbinic midrash in that each commentary is the product of a single identifiable author. Rabbinic midrash emerges in collections compiled from numerous sources, some attributed to rabbinic authorities, others anonymous. The collections often make no attempt to read as a running commentary to biblical text on a verse by verse basis. Furthermore, midrash often digresses widely from the underlying text, using it as a launching point to address unrelated matters. In this sense, medieval exegesis resembles the targumim more in that they both run alongside the scriptural source, responding to exegetical issues verse by verse. The medieval commentaries also share with the targumim a concern for clarification of scriptural meaning. While midrash is also interested in clarification of meaning, it does so through greater discursion. Of course, some of the targumim we have examined do so as well. However, the medieval commentators diverge from the targumim by abandoning the form of translation, even though they often rely on the targumim to assist with explication of difficult terms. Writing primarily in Hebrew, these medieval exegetes seek to elucidate the meaning of biblical material through explanation rather than translation.

Medieval Jewish biblical exegesis as we know it, as opposed to midrashic interpretation, began in the geonic period in the ninth through eleventh centuries. The geonim of Babylon were influenced by Islamic study of the Qur'an and the way Islamic scholars critically approached their own text. They were also conscious of Karaite exegesis, which, in its theological rejection of rabbinic oral traditions, focused on biblical text with an emphasis on grammar and

lexicography.⁶⁷⁰ Karaite exegesis, which emerged in the ninth century and was itself influenced by Islamic scholarship, posed a challenge to rabbinic authority. In rejecting the Oral Torah, the Karaites argued for scriptural primacy. Because Karaites were unimpressed with appeals to the oral tradition, rabbinic anti-Karaite polemics had to be based on scriptural grounds, prompting rabbinic authorities to interact with Scripture on its own terms.⁶⁷¹ Even after Karaism ceased to pose a strong challenge to rabbinic authority, the rabbinic exegetical focus on language, history, and the literary qualities of Tanakh endured.⁶⁷² Although the geonim were primarily talmudic scholars, not biblical exegetes, Saadia ben Joseph (882-942), better known as Saadia Gaon, wrote translations and commentaries on a number of biblical works in the tenth century. Saadia was also a vocal anti-Karaite polemicist, and he sought to create a synthesis between linguistic, commonsense readings of Scripture and rabbinic traditions.⁶⁷³

The Jewish exegetical focus on grammar and language shifted to Spain in the tenth and eleventh centuries, which saw the composition of seminal grammatical works by Judah Hayyuj and Jonah ibn Janah.⁶⁷⁴ While Hayyuj and ibn Janah were not exegetes themselves, their groundbreaking grammatical studies paved the way for linguistic exegesis.⁶⁷⁵ Abraham ibn Ezra

⁶⁷⁰ Barry D. Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-4.

⁶⁷¹ Daniel Frank, "Karaite Exegesis," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 110-111, 115-116.

⁶⁷² Polliack, "Concepts of Scripture among the Jews of the Medieval Islamic World," 98-99.

⁶⁷³ Robert Brody, "The Geonim of Babylonia as Biblical Exegetes," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 75-77.

⁶⁷⁴ Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 4.

⁶⁷⁵ Aharon Maman, "The Linguistic School: Judah Hayyuj, Jonah ibn Janah, Moses ibn Chiquitilla and Judah ibn Bal'am," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, edited by Magne Saebo (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 263-275.

(1092-1167) carried the Spanish-Arabic tradition with him to Italy, France, and England.⁶⁷⁶ In addition to a strong focus on grammar, ibn Ezra attempts to ground his commentary in reason, relying on the plain meaning of biblical text rather than on midrash.⁶⁷⁷ Joseph Kimḥi (1105-1170) also moved from Islamic Spain to Christian Europe, settling in Provence, France in approximately 1150 and bringing Spanish exegetical approaches with him. His son, David Kimḥi (1160-1235), also known as Radak, wrote grammatical works and several commentaries on various books of Tanakh.⁶⁷⁸ Joseph Kimḥi ostensibly rejects midrash, although it occasionally informs his rationalist, contextual approach. David Kimḥi, on the other hand, embraces midrash, incorporating it into his commentary. However, he is always careful to distinguish between rabbinic tradition and more literal, rationalist interpretations of Scripture.⁶⁷⁹

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries there emerged a Jewish exegetical emphasis on the plain meaning of biblical text, also known as *peshat*. This *peshat* form of analysis did not ignore rabbinic tradition, especially its halakhic traditions. However, it did emphasize understanding of Tanakh in its own literary context.⁶⁸⁰ The *peshat* movement was obviously a culmination of the linguistic approach that began in the geonic period and migrated from Babylon, through Spain, and into northern France. However, it was also influenced by the twelfth century European Renaissance that saw a rise in reason and a preference for more literal

⁶⁷⁶ Walfish, “An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation,” 4.

⁶⁷⁷ Uriel Simon, “Abraham Ibn Ezra.” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 378-379.

⁶⁷⁸ Walfish, “An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation,” 4.

⁶⁷⁹ Mordechai Cohen, “The Qimhi Family,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 390-394, 397-398.

⁶⁸⁰ Robert A. Harris, “Concepts of Scripture in the School of Rashi,” in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 103-107.

interpretations of the Bible. This period was also marked by closer Jewish-Christian cultural contacts as well as Jewish-Christian polemics. Thus, a preference for *peshat* exegesis in Northern France may have also reflected a Jewish response to Christological interpretations of the Bible.⁶⁸¹

Ibn Ezra and the Kimḥis were proponents of *peshat* exegesis. Although not a pure *peshatist*, Solomon ben Isaac (1040-1105), better known as Rashi, understood the concept of *peshat* and made use of it in his commentary. Rashi, however, was also loyal to rabbinic midrashic traditions, liberally using selected midrashim to elucidate biblical material. His commentary, written clearly and concisely, was highly accessible, and his judicious use of midrash made it fun to read. These qualities made his commentary very popular. It emerged as one of the key Jewish texts of the Middle Ages.⁶⁸² Rashi often relies on the targumim to derive linguistic meaning. Rashi exhibits little interest in philosophy or mysticism.⁶⁸³ Instead, he focuses on practical concerns such as geography, history, and chronology in order to make biblical texts more accessible to his readers. Scholars continue to debate the extent to which Rashi understood the distinction between *peshat* and *drash*. Often, Rashi concerns himself with the linguistic meaning of scriptural words. However, he also uses the term פשוטו של מקרא to refer to the “true” meaning of Scripture on its own terms. Sarah Kamin argues that for Rashi, the true meaning of Scripture is its conceptual meaning, which is often revealed in the midrashic sources.

⁶⁸¹ Avraham Grossman, “The School of Literal Jewish Exegesis in Northern France,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 323-330.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 332-346; Walfish, “An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation,” 4-5.

⁶⁸³ Grossman, “The School of Literal Jewish Exegesis in Northern France,” 338-339.

Thus, the strict conceptual distinction between *peshat* and *drash* was not one to which Rashi adhered.⁶⁸⁴

Joseph Kara (approximately 1060-1130), was another exegete associated with the *peshat* movement who actually opposed homiletic interpretations. Rashi's grandson, Samuel ben Meir (approximately 1080-1174), better known as Rashbam, became one of the foremost champions of *peshat* exegesis, altogether ignoring aggadic midrash in his commentaries.⁶⁸⁵ Rashbam, in a historical defense of the *peshat* method, claimed that his grandfather Rashi confessed that if he had to write his commentaries all over again, he would do so using Rashbam's strict *peshat* method (Rashbam, Gen. 37:2). The *peshat* movement, which had its center in northern France, had parallels in Christian biblical scholarship around the same time. At the School of St. Victor in Paris, monk Andrew pursued *hebraica veritas* with the same dedication that Rashbam advocated *peshat*.⁶⁸⁶ The *peshat* movement, however, died out rather quickly. Avraham Grossman attributes this to the end of the Twelfth Century Renaissance, the souring of Jewish-Christian relations, and the preference of lay readership for rabbinic midrash instead of *peshat*, which they found less appealing.⁶⁸⁷ Here again, is further reason why Rashi's popularity endured long after the height of *peshat* exegesis had waned.

By the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, the Jewish approach to biblical exegesis moved away from *peshat* and focused more on philosophy and mysticism. Commentators like

⁶⁸⁴ Sarah Kamin, *רש"י: פשוטו של מקרא ומדרשו של מקרא* [*Rashi's Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash*] (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1986), 13, 20, 111, 115.

⁶⁸⁵ Grossman, "The School of Literal Jewish Exegesis in Northern France," 358-359; Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 5.

⁶⁸⁶ Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 5.

⁶⁸⁷ Grossman, "The School of Literal Jewish Exegesis in Northern France," 370-371.

Levi ben Gershom (1288-1344), also known as Gersonides or Ralbag, and Joseph ibn Kaspi (1279-1340) were Aristotelian rationalists in the model of the great medieval Jewish thinker, Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204), also known as Maimonides or Rambam.⁶⁸⁸ Maimonides himself was not an exegete proper. He was a halakhist and philosopher. However, in his philosophical works, especially *The Guide to the Perplexed*, he addresses hermeneutical approaches to Scripture. In addition, exegetical statements appear throughout many of his works, both philosophical and halakhic. Thus, it becomes possible to discuss Maimonides' exegetical views even though he never wrote any works dedicated to biblical exegesis.

At the same time, the rise of kabbalah, a form of Jewish mysticism, influenced commentators like Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270), also known as Nahmanides or Ramban. Nahmanides' commentary often responds to Rashi and ibn Ezra, challenging their assertions and responding with his own. His approach relies heavily on psychological insight, while his occasional allusions to hidden meanings lend credibility to kabbalistic notions.⁶⁸⁹ Nahmanides, unlike many of his contemporaries and unlike midrashic literature, is far more comfortable criticizing biblical heroes.⁶⁹⁰ The Zohar, written in the thirteenth century, is kabbalah's best known text. The Zohar helped to develop the four tiered approach to Torah understanding known as *pardes*, which consists of 1) *peshat*, a historical approach to the text, 2) *remez*, a philosophical approach, 3) *drash*, a homiletic approach, and 4) *sod*, representing mystical levels

⁶⁸⁸ Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 5-6.

⁶⁸⁹ Yaakov Elman, "Moses ben Nahman/Nahmanides (Ramban)," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) 416-418, 432; Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 6.

⁶⁹⁰ Elman, "Moses ben Nahman/Nahmanides," 432.

of understanding.⁶⁹¹ In this sense, the kabbalists were well versed in the more established forms of exegetical interpretation and did not reject them. However, they saw the mystical level of interpretation as a way not to gain textual insight but to connect to the divine. For the kabbalists, the Torah itself becomes a manifestation of the divine. Thus, biblical figures, instead of representing historical personages, become symbols or aspects of the divine.⁶⁹²

Despite the ascendant popularity of kabbalism, more traditional exegetical approaches endured. Furthermore, mysticism did not negate the other approaches to exegesis, as kabbalistic exegetes were still able to discuss Tanakh in more traditional terms. The end of the Middle Ages saw the commentary of Isaac Arama (1420-1494), an innovative exegete who relied on psychological and philosophical insight. His student, Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508), mixed midrash, philosophy, and theology in his commentary.⁶⁹³ Abravanel, in addition to being a Torah scholar, was a wealthy financier who occupied positions of power and advised kings and rulers in Portugal, Spain, Naples, and Venice, writing his commentaries in his spare time.⁶⁹⁴ His unique economic and political perspective is often reflected in his commentary.⁶⁹⁵

The trajectory of medieval exegetical trends wends its way from the discovery of grammar, to rationalist approaches, to the *peshat* movement, to philosophy, and to mysticism. Regardless of methodology, medieval attitudes do not necessarily reflect the original intent of

⁶⁹¹ Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 6-7. The *pardes* system is well-established, but scholars and religious authorities often vary in their definitions of the four parts, especially *remez*.

⁶⁹² Moshe Idel, "Kabbalistic Exegesis," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 458-459.

⁶⁹³ Walfish, "An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 7-8.

⁶⁹⁴ Seymour Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel: Defender of the Faith* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 3-6; Abraham Melamed and Menachem Kellner, "Introduction to the Special Issue of Jewish History Marking the 500th Anniversary of Isaac Abravanel's Death," *Jewish History*, 23 (2009): 219.

⁶⁹⁵ Melamed and Kellner, "Introduction to the Special Issue," 219-220.

Scripture. Discomfort with the plain meaning of a biblical text can prompt allegorical reading and a reconstruction of the text to align with rabbinic attitudes, even among exegetes who purport to embrace *peshat*. The abandonment of *peshat* in favor of allegorical interpretation is not always done consistently, but rather is applied to serve the interpretive interests of the given commentator.⁶⁹⁶ Furthermore, even the strictest *peshatist* may engage in apologetics despite the clear meaning of the underlying text. Thus, despite the influence of the *peshat* movement, Jewish exegetical treatments in the Middle Ages do not necessarily adhere strictly to the plain meaning of the text of 1 Kings 11 when addressing Solomon's sins.

The various exegetical approaches during the Middle Ages do not culminate in any particular resolution or dominant hermeneutical methodology. All of these exegetical strategies continue to influence Jewish understanding of Tanakh long past the Middle Ages. Traditional exegesis after the Middle Ages continues in these veins. For this reason, our study of Jewish exegetical responses to Solomon ends here. The commentaries of David Altschuler, also known as the Metzudat David, in the eighteenth century, or those of Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Wisser, also known as the Malbim, in the nineteenth century, both extremely popular to this day, follow the same form of commentary and incorporate approaches solidly established in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the emergence of Jewish mystical approaches to Tanakh also creates a terminus for our discussion. Kabbalistic exegesis ceases to respond to Solomon as a historical individual, instead rendering him in more symbolic terms. Since kabbalah values Solomon as a symbolic figure, it is not interested in the sins of the historic Solomon, neither to castigate him

⁶⁹⁶ Julia Schwartzmann, "Gender Concepts of Medieval Jewish Thinkers and the Book of Proverbs," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 7, no. 3 (2000): 201-202. Schwartzmann's observations specifically address misogynistic assumptions in medieval rabbinic commentary to the Book of Proverbs, specifically the demonization of "the Strange Woman," the desexualization of "Lady Wisdom," and efforts to rob "the Woman of Strength" of her feminine identity. However, Schwartzmann's observations regarding rabbinic use of allegory and abandonment of *peshat* in the face of discomforting material is valuable for a broader evaluation of medieval hermeneutics.

nor to redeem him. At any rate, kabbalism and mysticism are esoteric traditions that are not necessarily shared with the masses. This kabbalistic esotericism does not evoke the esoteric Solomon that the classical rabbis worked so hard to suppress. It refers rather to the esotericism of those who practiced kabbalah. The Solomon of the *Zohar* is not Solomon *magus*. Rather, he becomes a symbol of the unification of aspects of the divine. Kabbalistic esotericism, in contrast to that of late antiquity, was not the product of popular literature or legend. Rather, it was kept within select groups deemed worthy of learning mystical secrets. Thus, mystical images of Solomon have less of an influence on popular perception. The other medieval exegetes, on the other hand, did alter those perceptions through their commentary, which was aimed at a general audience and remained popular long after their composition.

6.2 The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages

Many of the attitudes toward the Song of Songs exhibited in rabbinic literature and the targumim carry over into the Middle Ages. For example, with a few exceptions based on *b. Bava Batra* 15a, the consensus among medieval commentators was to maintain the rabbinic presumption that Solomon authored the three works attributed to him.⁶⁹⁷ The overwhelming medieval approach to the Song was to read it allegorically. The rabbis of the Middle Ages, just like their predecessors in late antiquity, had to contend with the Song's forthright eroticism. And like their predecessors, the Jewish medieval exegetes had no sense that Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs could have been written as critiques of Solomon. Their presumption that Solomon was the author makes this critical reading of Solomon very difficult, even if this was the original purpose of these works.

⁶⁹⁷ Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 95-96.

Rashi is no exception. Rashi reads the Song of Songs as a history of God's relationship with Israel from the Exodus until messianic times. In so doing, he relies almost entirely on the Targum of Song of Songs, which is the original source of this particular historical allegory.⁶⁹⁸ Rashi is not the only medieval exegete to be influenced by Targum Song of Songs. Because of the Targum's coherent and consistent methodology, it allows a commentator to adopt its interpretive approach wholly or to preserve the basic framework and impose an entirely new historical reading onto the underlying scriptural text. For example, ibn Ezra, at least partially, adopts the framework utilized by the Targum, but imposes his own reading on the text. Rashi, on the other hand, preserves Targum Song of Songs' interpretation as a whole, incorporating its specific reading into his commentary on the Song of Songs.⁶⁹⁹ In this sense, Rashi's commentary on the Song of Songs can conceivably be read as a commentary on Targum Song of Songs as well.⁷⁰⁰

One can argue that Rashi utilizes Targum Song of Songs in the same way that he utilizes midrash in his commentary to the Torah. With regard to the Torah, Rashi incorporates this midrashic material to explicate the text. However, in his commentary to the Song, instead of picking and choosing midrashim from a multitude of midrashic sources, Rashi relies predominantly on a single source, the Targum. Rashi does not explain why he chooses the Targum over other available midrashic sources to interpret the Song. However, this choice may reflect Rashi's dissatisfaction with the midrashim on the Song of Songs. The midrashim of *Song*

⁶⁹⁸ Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory," 23; McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 326; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Asceticism and Eroticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophical and Mystical Exegesis of the Song of Songs," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 93.

⁶⁹⁹ Alexander, "Textual Criticism and Rabbinic Literature," 172.

⁷⁰⁰ Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory," 23-24.

of Songs Rabbah seldom explicate the biblical text in its own right. Rather, they frequently indulge in homiletic allegory reflecting on other biblical material. In his commentary to the Torah, Rashi exhibits a preference for midrashim that explicate the text within the scriptural context from which they emerge. In the general absence of midrashim that do this for the Song of Songs, it is likely that Rashi found a more satisfying framework for his commentary in Targum Song of Songs.

Despite this reliance on the Targum, Rashi's commentary on the Song of Songs is not merely a slavish reproduction of Targum Song of Songs. In his introduction to his commentary on the Song, Rashi likens the female figure to a woman suffering a living widowhood, longing for her absent husband. Kamin notes that this is somewhat strange since there is no indication in the Song itself that the young lovers are married. Nor is there any similar claim made in rabbinic literature,⁷⁰¹ including in Targum Song of Songs. Despite Rashi's adoption of the Targum's interpretive framework, it is this motif of the living widowhood that forms the foundation of his understanding of the Song of Songs. The Targum's framework of the Song as Solomonic prophecy about Israel's future history allows Rashi to apply its allegorical message to his time as well. In so doing, Rashi reflects on the exile, assuring his readers that it is temporary.⁷⁰²

Kamin reads Rashi's approach within the context of anti-Christian polemics of his own time. Rejecting the Christian notion that Israel's continued exile proves God's rejection of

⁷⁰¹ Kamin is correct that the concept of the living widow is not applied to the Song of Songs in rabbinic literature. However, the concept of a living widowhood does appear in rabbinic literature in a number of places. For example, the Talmud invokes the idea in its interpretation of verses from Lamentations. Where Jerusalem is likened to a widow (Lam. 1:1), Rabbi Judah seeks to soften the description and render it a blessing. "Like a widow, but not a real widow" (*b. Taanit* 20a). Rashi explains that Lamentations does not say that Jerusalem will be a widow, but that it will be "like a widow." This, Rashi explains, is "like a woman who remains in living widowhood for her husband who went away and will return in the future" (Rashi, *b. Taanit* 20a, ולא אלמנה גמורה). Here Rashi voices the self-same concept that forms the framework of his approach to the Song.

⁷⁰² Kamin, *פשוטו של מקרא ומדרשו של מקרא*, 248-250, 262.

Judaism in favor of Christianity, Rashi maintains that God and Israel are still married. While Israel is a living widow, her covenant with God is still valid and has not been annulled or superseded. Rashi is less concerned about messianic times and more concerned with helping Jews make sense of their current exile. His message, primarily aimed at Jews, not Christians, is one of assurance that God still loves Israel. Thus, Rashi attributes the exile to baseless hatred among Jews (Rashi, Song 6:12), thereby countering Christian notions of God's rejection of Israel or punishing them for killing Jesus. Rashi also emphasizes that the *Shekhinah*, God's presence, accompanies Israel into exile (Rashi, Song 4:8). Similarly, Rashi describes the *Shekhinah* resting on those who remain in exile but learn Torah in the synagogues and study houses (Rashi, Song 6:2).⁷⁰³ In all of these instances, Rashi departs from the exegetical framework of the Targum to create his own message of consolation in exile.

While Targum Song of Songs was already popular and received wide dissemination, Rashi's incorporation of the Targum's approach gave its reading of the Song an even wider audience. Rashi's commentaries were immensely popular among Jews, and they remain so to this day. However, Rashi's influence also extended to Christian scholars who eventually grew familiar with his writings. According to Alexander, Christian commentary on the Song of Songs did not embrace historical allegory until the fourteenth century. These Christian efforts were inspired by Jewish sources, especially Rashi. Thus, one can trace the development of the historical allegorical approach to the Song of Songs from its inception with Targum Song of Songs in the eighth century, to pseudo-Saadia in the tenth century, through Rashi in the eleventh century, and to Abraham ibn Ezra in the twelfth century.⁷⁰⁴ Through Rashi, the Targum's

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 248, 250-257, 260-261.

⁷⁰⁴ Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory," 25, 28-29; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 337.

approach spread and influenced Christian exegesis.⁷⁰⁵ Alexander's depiction of the Christian use of the Song as historical allegory may be overstated. Johannes Cocceius, a seventeenth century Reformer interprets the Song as a prophetic narrative regarding the history of the church culminating in the triumph of Protestantism.⁷⁰⁶ However, historical allegory does not seem to mark a significant feature of Christian approach to the Song. This does not mean that Christian exegetes were not aware of this approach and did not draw upon it. E. Ann Matter contends that Christians were independently familiar with the Targum Song of Songs and that both Christians and Rashi relied upon the Targum.⁷⁰⁷ However, it was Origen's allegorical approach that remained the dominant Christian interpretive strategy for the Song well into the Middle Ages, with medieval Christian exegetes building upon Origen's allegorical foundation.⁷⁰⁸

Whether or not Christianity was beginning to embrace historical allegory, Jewish exegetical approaches to the Song of Songs shifted in the twelfth century and thirteenth centuries. Jewish philosophy and mysticism, while very different in outlooks, both began to view the Song as an allegory about the relationship between the soul, which is female, and God or the Active Intellect, which is male. This approach is exemplified by the running commentary of Gersonides which consistently relates the Song to the soul's yearning for the Active Intellect. Earlier, Maimonides had argued that the Song was an allegory about the soul's love for God

⁷⁰⁵ Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory," 29; Alexander, "Tradition and Originality," 337; McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 326-327.

⁷⁰⁶ J. Paul Tanner, "The History of Interpretation of the Song of Songs," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 154, no. 613 (1997): 29.

⁷⁰⁷ E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 137. Matter claims Christian interpreters were familiar with the Targum via Origen, which is highly unlikely since Origen died in the middle of the third century, and Targum Song of Songs was not written until the sixth through eighth centuries. Regardless, it may be the case that medieval Christian interpreters were independently aware of the Targum without reliance on Rashi.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25, 30-31, 137; Tanner, "The History of Interpretation of the Song of Songs," 27.

(*Mishneh Torah, hilkhoh teshuvah* 10:3). While Maimonides was not a mystic, his approach was adopted by kabbalists such as Abraham Abulafia. The *Zohar* adopts this approach as well, but also views the Song as describing the interplay between the male and female aspects of the divine. The *Zohar* credits Solomon, through his building of the Temple, for creating a space on earth to facilitate the union of the divine bride, the palace, and the divine groom, the king.⁷⁰⁹

In this context, the *Zohar* gives Solomon an important role. The Tabernacle built by Moses becomes a prototype for Solomon's Temple (*Zohar* 2:143a-145b). The *Zohar* also draws a parallel between Moses and Solomon in that they both author famous songs. However, the *Zohar* also draws a parallel between Solomon and God. The *Zohar* states that the Song of Songs was given to Solomon on the day that he dedicated the Temple. In this way, Solomon's Song is dictated by God and simultaneously dictated by Solomon, uniting them just as the Temple unites heaven and earth. This seems to place Solomon on a higher level than Moses. While Moses reaches the peak of prophecy, it is Solomon's Song that has the power not just to unite God and humanity, but also to unite the male and female aspects of God within the precincts of the Temple. It is this achievement that brings Solomon to a higher level than all other humans (*Zohar* 2:144b-145a).⁷¹⁰ This is high praise for Solomon. It is reminiscent of *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26, which describes Solomon as sitting on God's throne. Like Chronicles, the *Zohar* reimagines Solomon as perfect because of his relationship to the Temple. The *Zohar* is not concerned with the historic reality of Solomon's Temple. Rather, for kabbalistic purposes, the Temple becomes a template for the divine. The Solomon of history is equally irrelevant. His

⁷⁰⁹ Wolfson, "Asceticism and Eroticism," 93-96, 98-99.

⁷¹⁰ Arthur Green, "Intradivine Romance: The Song of Songs in the Zohar," in *Scrolls of Love: Ruth and the Song of Songs*, eds. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 223-224.

importance to the *Zohar* lies in his role as builder of the Temple, not the historic Temple, but the symbol of divine unification with humanity and with itself.

Solomon's role in the Song of Songs is thus solidified in the Middle Ages as wholly positive. Rashi's use of Targum Song of Songs guarantees its dominance in popular Jewish understanding of the Song.⁷¹¹ Solomon is established as a prophet, as an ideal king, and as a comforter of Israel in exile. Any notion that the Song of Songs was originally composed as criticism of Solomon is long forgotten. Rather, the Song of Songs becomes proof of Solomon's piety. He merits prophesying the future of Israel. In this way, Solomon attains the status of biblical prophet, not only foreseeing Israel's future, but also acting as a comforter to Israel. Solomon is no longer the failed king of the Book of Kings but rather stands among the ranks of Israel's great prophets. Ironically, it is the Song of Songs, a book that I contend was written to castigate Solomon and highlight his inadequacies in the face of David, his father, which becomes the instrument through which Solomon transforms in popular Jewish thought to the wise and noble prophet-king.

6.3 Commentary on the Solomon Narrative in Kings

While the popular perception of Solomon borne of the medieval treatment of the Song of Songs is unabashedly positive, this does not mean that the medieval exegetes entirely ignored the negative aspects of his character. Jewish exegetes still had to contend with the portrait of Solomon presented in the Book of Kings, especially in his downfall in chapter 11. The contrast

⁷¹¹ This dominance remains in contemporary Judaism, at least in the Orthodox world, and not without controversy. In 1977, the Artscroll imprint of Mesorah Publishing Ltd. released its translation of the Song of Songs. However, the translation, rather than actually translating the Song of Songs, offered an allegorical translation based on Rashi's commentary to the Song. In subsequent editions, Artscroll has retained its "allegorical translation," including in its hugely popular Stone Chumash.

between the prophetic Solomon of the Song of Songs and the sinful Solomon of Kings presented the medieval exegetes with a similar difficulty as that faced by the rabbis of late antiquity trying to square the vying portraits of Solomon in Kings and Chronicles. While we will see a greater willingness on the part of the medieval exegetes to praise Solomon and defend him, there are limits to this in the face of the text in Kings.

Like the midrashic sources, the medieval commentators discuss the nature of Solomon's divinely granted wisdom. This special wisdom poses a problem for them, because whatever the nature of this wisdom, it exceeds that of any other man. This would include Moses. As much as the medieval commentators are willing to laud Solomon, they are not willing to render him greater than Moses.⁷¹² Thus, the medieval commentators define and limit the nature of Solomon's wisdom in such a way that it cannot impinge on Moses' greatness. Rashi describes Solomon's wisdom as his ability to compose his three works as well as scientific and halakhic knowledge about flora and fauna (Rashi, 1 Kg. 5:13). Joseph Kara also discusses Solomon's knowledge of nature (Kara, 1 Kg. 5:13).⁷¹³ David Kimḥi limits Solomon's wisdom to a photographic memory, his gift being the ability to remember what he learned, as well as the ability to make logical inferences. With respect to Moses, Kimḥi grants Solomon superior wisdom only in the realm of science. However, he cannot match Moses' understanding of the divine (Radak, 1 Kg. 3:12). Gersonides circumscribes Solomon's surpassing wisdom by limiting its superiority to Solomon's own generation as well as the preceding generation and subsequent

⁷¹² Maimonides' seventh principle of his thirteen principles of faith is that Moses was the greatest prophet and that no human can attain the level of divine understanding achieved by Moses. This would necessarily include Solomon despite his unprecedented wisdom.

⁷¹³ Berger "The Wisest of All Men," 95.

generation. However, Solomon cannot claim to be the wisest man of all time (Ralbag, 1 Kg. 3:12).

The medieval commentators tend to exclude philosophy, metaphysics, and halakhic mastery from Solomon's repertoire. By doing so, they protect those subjects that are dearest to them, reserving them for Moses' superiority. Thus, Solomon is generally credited with mastery of science and nature, while Moses remains the undisputed champion of divine wisdom. Only Abravanel grants Solomon complete intellectual perfect, which forces him to distinguish Moses' superiority as being within the realm of prophecy (Abravanel, 1 Kg. 3:12). By limiting Solomon's wisdom to well-defined areas, such as science, the medieval commentators are better able to cope with Solomon's eventual sins.⁷¹⁴ This distinction does not negate, however, Solomon's status as a prophet. It just relegates him to a lower level of prophecy than that of Moses.

Even before treating Solomon's apostasy, the medieval exegetes are forced to contend with his marriages to foreign women. Gersonides is rather apologetic in his treatment of Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh. He claims that she converted to Judaism before their marriage, even though this is a "slight deviation" from the Torah law requiring Egyptians to wait three generations before entering the community of Israel (Ralbag, 1 Kg. 3:1). As David Berger notes, "It is difficult to envision a milder formulation." Even in chapter 11, Gersonides seems to sidestep the halakhic prohibitions barring Solomon's marriage to his foreign wives. Rather, he focuses on the fitness of the resulting offspring, ultimately blaming the dissolution of the united monarchy on Solomon's failure to properly instruct his children in obedience to God and Torah (Ralbag, 1 Kg. 11:1). This is especially odd given the complete lack of scriptural

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., 97-98, 101-102.

basis for such a conclusion in the Book of Kings. At the same time, Gersonides does acknowledge Solomon's violations of marrying foreign women and amassing wives, even if he ultimately mitigates their severity as merely improper for a king (*Ibid.*). David Kimḥi rescues Solomon from impropriety by citing the halakhic exemption for female converts (Radak, 1 Kg. 11:2). Abravanel attempts to offer halakhic proposals on how Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh was not sinful, but ultimately, he concedes that Solomon misinterpreted the halakhah (Abravanel, 1 Kg. 3:1). Abravanel fails to account how such a misinterpretation is possible given Solomon's perfect wisdom.⁷¹⁵ In the end, Solomon's marriages to foreign women, including those from peoples that the Torah specifically forbids, although troubling, are not a fatal flaw. The severity of those marriages can be mitigated through halakhic discourse.

Similarly, Solomon's violations of the kingly prohibitions in Deuteronomy fail to undermine Solomon's character. Most of the commentators are willing to hold Solomon accountable for these violations of Deuteronomic law. Following the lead of the midrashic tradition, Rashi, Joseph Kara, and David Kimḥi all see Solomon's conduct as the sinful result of his false conclusion that he could engage in forbidden conduct and still avoid its sinful consequences (Rashi, Deut. 17:16; Kara, 1 Kg., 10:28; Radak, 1 Kg. 11:1). Gersonides, the philosopher, is more hesitant to blame Solomon's sins on his faith in his own wisdom. Rather, he attributes Solomon's prohibited accumulations to overbearing temptation that overcame his wisdom (Ralbag, 1 Kg. 11:4). Abravanel does not see Solomon's accumulations as sinful. Rather, he justifies the accumulation of horses as bringing glory to the crown and assuring a vigorous military to preserve the peace (Abravanel, 1 Kg. 10:26). He justifies Solomon's lavish spending as contributing to the crown's fiscal health and facilitating the continuous financial

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-105; 104, fn. 28.

income into the capital, at least until war, which was the result of Solomon's sin, required taxation (Abravanel, 1 Kg. 10:22).⁷¹⁶ This attitude is certainly consistent with Abravanel's experience as finance minister and his understanding of a state's need to support a military and maintain financial security. Abravanel's understanding of the king is not as a limited figurehead, but as a true head of government. As such, the limits placed on the monarch by Deuteronomy 17 make little sense to Abravanel, and he is more willing to dismiss them for political considerations.

With regard to Solomon's responsibility for the dissolution of the united Israelite kingdom, the medieval exegetes are reluctant to blame Solomon's domestic policies. This may be true because Scripture blames the split in the kingdom on Solomon's sins, not his policy failures. Despite the popular complaint to Rehoboam regarding Solomon's onerous taxation and forced servitude, David Kimḥi and Gersonides portray these complaints as unjustified, as mere pretenses for secession (Radak, 1 Kg. 12:4; Ralbag, 1 Kg. 12:4). Ironically, Abravanel, who is unfailingly apologetic with regard to Solomon, is the only major exegete to take issue with his domestic policies. But rather than castigate Solomon, Abravanel recasts the policies, portraying the labor as voluntary and the taxes as tariffs, imposed only on foreigners, not on Israelites (Abravanel, 1 Kg. 9:20, 9:22).⁷¹⁷ Again, given Abravanel's own professional experiences, he cannot help but critique what he deems to be poor statecraft and fiscal policy. However, even though he allows himself to opine about policy, he is careful to distance that critique from Solomon himself.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 106, 113.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 109-112.

While most of the commentators can accept Solomon's violations of the prohibitions against multiplying wealth, horses, and wives, they cannot accept his descent into idolatry. Only ibn Kaspi allows for the possibility that in moments when his attention lapsed, Solomon allowed his wisdom to be overcome even to the point of worshipping idols (ibn Kaspi, 1 Kg. 11:3). In contrast, Rashi and David Kimḥi seek to limit his culpability by accusing him merely of failing to prevent his wives' idol worship (Rashi, 1 Kg. 11:7; Radak, 1 Kg. 11:1). Abravanel's treatment is even more exculpatory. He claims that Solomon, whose wisdom granted him knowledge of idolatry, merely shared this knowledge with his wives, never suspecting they would use it to actually practice idol worship (Abravanel, 1 Kg. 11:1). However, having established that Solomon's wives did indeed worship idols, Abravanel also propounds the opinion that Solomon's culpability extended to allowing his wives to do so without protesting (Abravanel, 1 Kg. 11:4-6). Thus, Solomon's wisdom facilitates the forbidden worship, but Solomon himself does not directly participate in any way.⁷¹⁸

The defense of Solomon in this instance might be dismissed as typical Jewish apologetics for biblical figures. However, for some of the exegetes, their defense of Solomon stands in stark contrast with their willingness to castigate David for his sins. For example, we saw that David Kimḥi refuses to charge Solomon with idolatry. Rather he opines that Solomon simply failed to prevent his wives' idolatry (Radak, 1 Kg. 11:1). While this explanation does not completely exonerate Solomon, it certainly mitigates the severity of his sins. This apologetic turn diverges sharply from Kimḥi's treatment of David's sin with Bathsheba:

And [David] did not sin with her on account of her menstrual impurity, but on account of adultery (אשת איש). And our rabbis of blessed memory said: Anyone who would go out

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., 106-109.

to war on behalf of the house of David would write a bill of divorce for his wife in case he died in war. Therefore, David arranged Uriah's death so she would be divorced retroactively (Radak, 2 Sam. 11:4).

True to form, Kimḥi distinguishes between *peshat* and *drash*. First he provides the reader with a more literal reading of the text: David committed adultery. But he follows this with a dutiful report on the midrashic tradition of the rabbis: Bathsheba was halakhically divorced. Kimḥi does not tell us which interpretation he prefers. However, by distinguishing between *peshat* and *drash* and by including both in his commentary, Kimḥi frees himself to be more frank in his depiction of David's sin. Kimḥi fearlessly calls the relationship *זנות*, the unequivocal halakhic term for adultery. He feels no need to soften the term or imbue his *peshat* explanation with apologetics. Rather, he allows the reader to consider the midrashic account as an alternative explanation. When it comes to Solomon, however, Kimḥi loses his nerve and resorts solely to midrashic apologetics, distancing Solomon from idolatry despite the plain *peshat* meaning of the biblical text.

Similarly, Abravanel's extraordinary defense of Solomon stands in contrast with his treatment of David's sins. With regard to David's sin with Bathsheba, Abravanel rejects apologetic efforts to defend David, especially since David confesses his own sin (2 Sam. 12:13). Furthermore, the book of Samuel expressly condemns David's conduct (2 Sam. 11:27). And if that were insufficient, the prophet Nathan's famous rebuke leaves little room for Abravanel's defense of David (2 Sam. 12:1-12).⁷¹⁹ In contrast, Abravanel ascribes human and political perfection to Moses and Solomon. Abravanel's Solomon becomes the greatest of all human philosophers. Abravanel attributes this perfection to the source of Solomon's wisdom, divine

⁷¹⁹ Amos Frisch, "The Sins of the Patriarchs as Viewed by Traditional Jewish Exegesis," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 10, no. 3 (2003): 272.

emanation. Solomon's moral perfection is reflected in the wisdom of Proverbs. Abravanel justifies Solomon's accumulation of wealth and horses as serving the glory of the kingdom. Solomon achieves political perfection in his role as a judge, in his maintaining national peace and security, in creating wealth, and his overseeing ambitious building projects.⁷²⁰ Abravanel's Solomon is nearly perfect, but he is undone by a fatal sin.⁷²¹ However, that sin is not the sin described in Kings.

Gersonides is most troubled by the possibility of Solomon's idolatry, placing it beyond the pale of comprehension:

After it notes that his wives turned his heart, it did not need to say, "And his heart was not whole with the Lord as the heart of David his father." If Solomon had had the desire to do so, he would have served other gods. And as to this it is clear that the desire in him was that his love for his wives turned his heart and allowed them to serve other gods and hid his eyes from them. And from this it is also made clear that when they said, "And Solomon went after Ashtoret, the god of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites," the intent is that he allowed his Zidonian and Ammonite wives to worship their gods, and he hid his eyes from them. For this reason it said, "And Solomon did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not go fully after the Lord." He should not have suffered to let his wives commit such a terrible transgression. And it further attests about this that it was his desire to hide his eyes from his wives and to allow them to serve other gods. They said, "And so he did for all of his foreign wives, who offered incense and offerings to their gods." This explains that Solomon's sin was that he allowed his wives to make offerings and incense to their gods, and about this there is no doubt. And as to this, "Then Solomon built a high place," it is as if he built it, after he allowed his wives to build it. And generally, since he had taken them [as wives], he had a reason to build these high places for idol worship. And as for Solomon having a reason

⁷²⁰ Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 10, 118-120.

⁷²¹ Berger "The Wisest of All Men," 114.

to build them, this is completely false. That a man as wise as Solomon would go after such futilities and abominations when he was able to better grasp the existence of the blessed God more than any other person, and also [the text] already attests on this regarding the books that he composed through divine providence, and also the blessed God appeared to him multiple times, for this reason it is unreasonable that a man like him would serve idolatry. And it is worth knowing that [the text] will say that so-and-so did something whether he did it himself or whether he did it through an agent. As Solomon said: “I have surely built a celestial home for You.” And so it will also say that he made it, in the sense that he did not protest making it, even though he had the opportunity to protest. And this is customary in language that you will see that someone who had the opportunity to protest but did not protest bears the blame of the matter, and they say of him that he did it all. For this reason I think the Torah said, “You will surely rebuke your friend, and not burden him with sin.” In other words, if you do not rebuke him, you will burden him with the sin that he was going to transgress. It is as if you committed that sin yourself... (Ralbag, 1 Kg. 11:4).

Here, Gersonides expressly articulates what troubles the medieval exegetes most about Solomon. Even an exegete like David Kimḥi, who is normally careful to distinguish between *peshat* and *drash*, offers a midrashic spin on the text without addressing the *peshat* reading that Solomon himself directly participates in idol worship. Kimḥi cannot bring himself to accuse Solomon of worshipping pagan gods. It is inconceivable that the prophet and author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, the man with unparalleled wisdom, could come to commit idolatry. Note that Gersonides does not rest this implausibility on Solomon’s building the Temple. This seems to pose no problem. Rather, it is Solomon’s intimacy with God, his understanding of God, his creative collaboration with God, and his direct contact with God that make his idol worship unthinkable. For this reason, Gersonides and others cannot countenance Solomon’s direct participation in idol worship. Even if his failure to prevent his wives’ idolatry

is legally tantamount to his committing idolatry himself, this is theologically far more acceptable than the possibility of Solomon directly participating in worshipping foreign gods.

Unlike the Song of Songs, the Book of Kings leaves little room for the medieval Jewish exegetes to ignore Solomon's sins. The commentators have no choice but to discuss Solomon's failings. Most of these commentators are willing to confront Solomon's sins even while many make efforts to minimize their severity. As a result, while they acknowledge the problematic nature of Solomon's conduct, the medieval exegetes are not overly troubled by his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh or his violation of the three kingly prohibitions. In contrast, however, they cannot conceive of his direct participation in idolatry, so they reduce his immediate culpability, describing his participation simply as a failure to intercede. The issue of Solomon's alleged apostasy brings the Solomon of the Song of Songs in direct conflict with the Solomon of Kings. In the medieval mindset, the Solomon of the Song is a prophet and creative collaborator with God. Even though the medieval perception of the Song whitewashes Solomon, the medieval treatment of Kings can still allow his sinfulness. It cannot, however, countenance Solomon's idolatry, which his role as prophetic composer of his three works makes inconceivable. In the end, Solomon may sin, but his worst sins are sins of omission, not direct betrayal of God.

The inconsistent treatment of David and Solomon by medieval commentators reveals an exegetical willingness to sacrifice methodological consistency for theological concerns. In addition, despite the purported adherence to particular interpretive strategies, a particular exegete may abandon that strategy when it leads to theologically unacceptable conclusions. While the medieval Jewish exegetes develop new interpretive approaches to Scripture, they also inherit previous strategies and traditions. These traditions are not easy to dismiss. Thus, despite the rise

of *peshat* exegesis, we see a tempering of strict *peshat* when it contradicts closely held midrashic traditions.

6.4 Solomonic Apologetics in the Middle Ages

As we have seen from the previous section, even when confronting material that imputes sin to Solomon, the Jewish medieval exegetes exhibit a strong impulse to defend him or at least mitigate the severity of his sins. Although we have seen similar apologetic tendencies within rabbinic literature, these tendencies were not as pervasive as they become in the Middle Ages. Midrashic literature boasts ample amounts of critical material on Solomon as well. The medieval impulse to defend Solomon is more pervasive. This willingness to bolster Solomon is not the only example of Jewish apologetics of the period. There exists within the Jewish medieval commentaries a general trend of apologetics with regard to Judaism's ancestors. This impulse begins in the geonic period, with the geonim evincing a strong willingness to defend biblical figures.⁷²² Amos Frisch examines this trend, noting that the impulse is not entirely consistent. A particular exegete may defend a patriarch in one context and criticize him in another. The apologetic approach tends to be the dominant one, so that even when a medieval commentator does castigate a biblical figure, he will often defend the same figure elsewhere. This mixed response to the sins of biblical heroes stems from the tension between two values: reverence for the historical figure and reverence for the truth. Thus, most exegetes attempt to forge a path that balances these two values, defending the dignity of Israel's ancestors, while occasionally criticizing them for their moral failings.⁷²³

⁷²² Brody, "The Geonim of Babylonia," 84.

⁷²³ Frisch, "The Sins of the Patriarchs," 266-273.

In addition, Berger notes a general hesitancy to upbraid biblical figures in Jewish medieval exegesis because Jews found themselves on the defensive in the face of Christian attack. For example, Christian sources in the thirteenth century tended to criticize Jacob as a symbol of his Jewish descendants, imputing to him disreputable qualities that Christians associated with Jews. Thus, it was a natural tendency for Jewish thinkers to defend biblical figures like Jacob in the face of such criticism. This type of defense was crucial to the Jewish sense of superiority that was necessary for the Jewish psyche in the Middle Ages. At the same time, Jewish sources were more willing to criticize biblical figures who were either associated with Jesus or who were used to justify Jesus' conduct. Thus, Berger opines that medieval sources were more willing to criticize David because of the Christian association of Jesus, as messiah, with David.⁷²⁴ In this sense, the ascendance and dominance of Christianity posed a direct challenge to Jewish exegetical perceptions, especially in Ashkenaz, in a way not experienced by the rabbis for most of late antiquity. While anti-Christian polemic exists in midrashic literature, Christianity did not exert such hegemonic control over the rabbis of Palestine, and it held no authority over the rabbis of Babylonia. Thus, the midrashic authorities were freer to criticize biblical figures such as Solomon without fear that these criticisms would be construed as denigrations of Judaism itself.

Abraham Melamed traces Jewish medieval apologetics for Solomon through the prism of Plato's philosopher-king. As we have seen, the apologetic impulse has existed throughout Jewish literature from biblical times as "an attempt to prove, in the circumstances of the

⁷²⁴ David Berger, "On the Morality of the Patriarchs in Jewish Polemic and Exegesis," in *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation*, eds. Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 49-52. Berger cites Nahmanides' willingness to criticize Abraham's treatments of Sarah and Hagar as a unique exception to the rule. This probably reflects Nahmanides' intellectual independence more than historic trends, as it is consistent with Nahmanides' general willingness to criticize, whether be it biblical figures or the opinions of his predecessors like Rashi and ibn Ezra.

diaspora, the cultural and even political primacy of Judaism.” The philosopher-king became a useful tool for Jewish thinkers to portray biblical figures, such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon, in the mold of the ideal leader. The apologetic use of the philosopher-king model in the Diaspora depicted a mythical view of Jewish history, turning kings into paragons and ideals despite historic reality.⁷²⁵ At the same time, the rise of the philosopher-king model and its association with Solomon may have served to dampen more esoteric responses to Solomon that had proved popular among Christians into the Middle Ages, especially by the time of the Enlightenment.⁷²⁶

Nowhere is this transformation more evident, argues Melamed, than with Solomon. For some reason, it was more acceptable to criticize David’s sins.⁷²⁷ “The image of Solomon’s kingship as the zenith of the ancient Jewish state was so powerful, however, and so well-reinforced in medieval culture – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim alike – that the royal blemishes were overlooked.”⁷²⁸ In this way, popular perceptions of Solomon in Islam and Christianity influenced Jewish evaluation of Solomon. In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante places Solomon in Heaven (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, X, 100-129).⁷²⁹ Machiavelli accepted this mythical image of Solomon and blamed Rehoboam for the split of the kingdom (Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, chap. 19), although Machiavelli’s admiration for Solomon

⁷²⁵ Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 6, 111.

⁷²⁶ Harkins, “The *Odes of Solomon*,” 273.

⁷²⁷ While David commits adultery and murder in the Bathsheba affair, the medieval exegetes also attempt to mitigate the severity of these crimes. Regardless, David’s sins are sins of passion, and the rabbis are fairly comfortable admonishing him for them. Despite these very human failings, David always remains faithful to God. On the other hand, Solomon’s sin of idolatry is untenable, thus the rabbis must redefine Solomon’s sin to something less objectionable.

⁷²⁸ Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 111-112.

⁷²⁹ Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, 170.

probably stems more from his ability to maintain power over his kingdom than from his reputation for divinely inspired wisdom. Machiavelli's Solomon is a strong king, while, Rehoboam is a weak prince.⁷³⁰ Christian praise of Solomon must have made Jewish criticism of its own king feel awkward. Thus, Jewish apologetic impulses may have stemmed from proprietary pride in Israel's ancestors.

Melamed suggests that the legendary aspects of his wisdom and his reign, the dream at Gibeon, the judgment of the prostitutes, the building of the Temple, and the Queen of Sheba, fit so well with the idea of the philosopher-king, that they overshadowed the negative aspects of Solomon's narrative. "These events, along with the attribution of the three wisdom books to this king, cast a spell on the historical imagination." Even though the rabbinic literature of late antiquity offers a more multivalent and nuanced view of Solomon and evinces a willingness to criticize his failings, this view gave way to a more mythical and stereotypical image, which was intensified over the course of time and by the need for apologia in the Diaspora. As a result, many medieval Jewish philosophers utterly ignore Solomon's sins or explain them away.⁷³¹

Melamed points to aspects of medieval Jewish thought on Solomon that reflect parallels with the philosopher-king model. Saadia Gaon discusses the thirteen loves that help a person to realize his purpose, many of which parallel the thirteen attributes of God. According to Melamed, Saadia attributes these virtues to Solomon, who is depicted as the prototype of the wise king (*The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, ch.10). Maimonides describes the King-Messiah in terms of platonic perfection, ranking him nearly as great a prophet as Moses but even wiser

⁷³⁰ Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 112, 163-164. Machiavelli still views David as the better king. While Solomon is a strong king, Machiavelli sees him as benefitting from fortune, while David commands greater virtue (Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, chap. 19).

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

than Solomon. According to Maimonides, the messianic world will experience peace and abundance as it did in the time of Solomon, (*Mishneh Torah, hilkhoh melakhim 12:5*).

Maimonides acknowledges Solomon's vices, acknowledging that no man is perfect, without ever addressing his more serious sins.⁷³² For both Saadia Gaon and Maimonides, Solomon is discussed in terms of an ideal, not as a historic reality. Solomon becomes a foundation for discussing human perfection. This type of perfection evokes the potential exhibited by the Solomon of Kings at the height of his Golden Age rather than the reality of his downfall. This use of Solomon serves solely to further a philosophical argument, reducing him to a theoretical Solomon.

Solomon appeals to Maimonides because he acts as a model of matching intellectual perfection with practical behavior. Maimonides is also attracted to Solomon's reputation for expertise on esoteric knowledge and mastering hidden secrets, knowledge which Maimonides construes as Metaphysics.⁷³³ Thus, Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* credits Solomon with reaching the highest possible level of human knowledge (*Guide 3:3*), placing him on a par with Moses, at least in the realm of intellectual achievement. In other respects, Maimonides' Solomon falls short of Moses as well as the Messiah. Maimonides is willing to classify Solomon as a prophet, but he concludes that Solomon wrote his three books only through divine inspiration. That is, his writing derived from divine inspiration interacting with his own imagination. His works were not dictated by God through a dream or vision. Initially, Maimonides describes the vision at Gibeon as prophecy, thus rendering Solomon a prophet, but

⁷³² Ibid., 24, 44, 112-113.

⁷³³ Note that Maimonides' conception of the esoteric Solomon bears no resemblance to Solomon *magus* popular in late antiquity and in Christian texts. Rather, the esoteric Solomon of Maimonides is, like Maimonides himself, a metaphysicist.

he also cites David and Solomon as proof that prophecy is not predicated on moral perfection, Solomon having his weakness for women (*Eight Chapters* 7). However, later in the *Guide to the Perplexed*, Maimonides seems to revise this position, characterizing Solomon's communications with God as coming through the medium of another prophet and thus more within the realm of divine inspiration. This position reduces the experience at Gibeon from true prophecy to merely a dream informed by divine inspiration and his own imaginative faculties. In the end, Maimonides does not consider Solomon a prophet. This explains Maimonides' frequent use of the phrases *היא שלמה אמר בחכמתו*, "this is what Solomon said in his wisdom," and *וכן אמר שלמה*, "and so Solomon said in his wisdom."⁷³⁴

The use of the philosopher-king as a model for Jewish biblical leadership, including Solomon, took off in earnest in the thirteenth century. Yohanan Alemanno, a Jewish philosopher in fifteenth century Italy, specifically applied the virtues of the philosopher-king to Solomon. In his *Heshek Shelomo*, an allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, Alemanno lists Solomon's seventeen virtues, matching them up with those of the philosopher-king. In this way, Alemanno not only defends Solomon's character, but he also argues that the ancient Israelites anticipated Plato. While Alemanno is also critical of Solomon, since no human biblical leader was perfect, he still views him as a righteous king, a prototype of the philosopher-king, and perfect in all of his virtues.⁷³⁵

The depiction of Solomon as the ideal philosopher-king is also reflected in Christian writings of the Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), despite his lack of familiarity with

⁷³⁴ Sarah Klein-Braslavy, *שלמה המלך והאזוטריזם הפילוסופי במשנת הרמב"ם* [King Solomon and the Philosophical Esotericism in Maimonides' Mishnah] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), 116-117, 120-123, 127, 165, 174-175, 177-180, 187-188.

⁷³⁵ Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 5, 107-108, 113, 122-123.

Plato, saw Solomon as the foremost example of the wise ruler. He based this conclusion on Solomon's authorship of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, never referencing the book of Kings. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) gives Solomon a similar treatment based on his association with wisdom literature. He also focuses on the dream at Gibeon as the basis for Solomon's identity with the philosopher-king. In this analysis, both Aquinas and Erasmus ignore Moses, who is less obviously kingly and too strongly identified with Jewish law for Christian tastes to fill the role of the ideal ruler.⁷³⁶

Solomon's purported authorship of the works attributed to him played a powerful role in the redemption of Solomon in Christian thought in the Middle Ages. Some Christian scholars were troubled by Solomon's lack of repentance in Kings, allowing for lingering uncertainty regarding his salvation. Thus, although Dante is able to place Solomon in Paradise, he acknowledges that the world wants to know "tidings" about him (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, X.108-111), indicating that there was no popular consensus that Solomon belonged there. One response was to shore up Solomon as a Christian exemplar by simply ignoring the negative material about Solomon from 1 Kings 11. Jerome (387-420) viewed Ecclesiastes as Solomon's penitence. Origen, Jerome, and Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141) all viewed the three Solomonic works as espousing Christian values, with Solomon's authorship guaranteeing their unassailable authority. Other Christian thinkers either acknowledged Solomon's sins without trying to resolve them or conceded that Solomon, like all men, was flawed. These responses to the problems posed by Solomon developed in light of legends surrounding Solomon, apocryphal writings, and Jewish traditions. Medieval Christian schools

⁷³⁶ Ibid., 142, 144-145.

were aware of Jewish lore such as the Ashmedai legend as well as of the writings of Josephus, and all of these materials were distilled within medieval histories of Solomon's life.⁷³⁷

Thus, we have a number of motivations for Jewish exegetical apologetic tendencies toward Solomon. The image of the prophetic Solomon who foresees Israel's future and comforts them in exile casts Solomon as a sinless ideal. This particular image of Solomon gained traction with popular readership as well as with medieval commentators. In addition, exegetical responses to the Book of Kings acknowledge Solomon's failings, but in a way that minimizes their severity. This tendency seems motivated by the inability of medieval Jewish commentators to conceive of an idolatrous Solomon. The overall tendency to defend biblical figures also became an expression of Jewish pride in the face of Christian dominance and persecution. This particular tendency expresses itself in Jewish conceptions of Solomon as the ideal king in the model of Plato's philosopher-king. At the source of many of these contributing factors is Solomon's role as a prophet or recipient of divine inspiration. Solomon's divine inspiration forms the basis of his portrayal in medieval understandings of the Songs of Songs. It is what prevents the medieval exegetes from entertaining the possibility that Solomon could commit idolatry. It is the wisdom God grants him through prophetic revelation that makes him an ideal ruler and thinker. For the medieval rabbis, it is not Solomon's role in building the Temple that saves Solomon. It is his role as a prophet solidified in their understanding of the Song of Songs.

⁷³⁷ Mishtooni Bose, "From Exegesis to Appropriation: The Medieval Solomon," *Medium Ævum*, 65, no. 2 (1996): 187-193.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: THE REHABILITATION OF SOLOMON

The Book of Kings is the foundational text of the Solomon narrative. It is the text against which all other Solomonic treatments must be compared, since it is the text to which they either respond or they choose to ignore. Despite some scholarly claims to the contrary, the Book of Kings, offers a mostly but not entirely critical portrait of Solomon, despite his other achievements. This critical assessment is subtly mixed with laudatory material, but it makes itself felt from the very beginning of the Solomon narrative in Kings. The succession narrative, while seeking to legitimize Solomon's claim to the throne, paints a nasty picture of his efforts to secure his power and eliminate his enemies.

Even during the height of his reign, Kings plants hints that there is something wrong with Solomon. Our examination of the Golden Age approach, which saw Solomon's reign as fundamentally positive until his downfall, revealed an organizational effort within Kings to bifurcate Solomon's reign between positive and negative material. However, despite this effort, material that reflects negatively on Solomon persists within the purported Golden Age section. In the end, we concluded that the distinction between the Golden Age approach to Solomon and the approach that sees him as flawed from the start are not as diametrically opposed as they seem. Most Golden Age proponents concede the presence of troubling material earlier in Solomon's reign. However, they argue that Kings is organized in such a way to create the impression that Solomon's flaws come to bear only later in his life. In either case, the Solomon of Kings is problematic. Whether Kings seeks to castigate Solomon throughout his career or waits until the end of his reign, it castigates him all the same. The fact that his sins come at the end makes them no less egregious, and the consequence is the same either way, the dissolution of

the united Davidic monarchy. In our final evaluation, the severe nature of Solomon's sins is quite damning. Kings' depiction of Solomon's apostasy is unequivocal.

One aspect of the Solomon narrative in Kings that is of significant impact to our study is the realization that Kings leaves Solomon's character so poorly defined. The fact that Solomon is so inadequately characterized in Kings renders his character especially malleable. Even Solomon's most famous characteristic, his wisdom, is subject to ambiguity and scrutiny. This malleability of character allows subsequent readers to impose whatever traits on Solomon they choose. This lack of characterization paves the way for Solomon's rehabilitation because it allows subsequent treatments of Solomon to impose upon him righteousness, piety, contrition, or any other positive trait desired. Despite Kings' final judgment of Solomon as the most serious of sinners, his reputation somehow survives. His malleable character has much to do with this.

Chronicles capitalizes on this malleability. Chronicles co-opts the Solomon of Kings and reworks him for its own theological purposes. Chronicles is primarily concerned with the primacy and centrality of the second Temple and the viability of the restoration community, which it seeks to sustain through adherence to covenantal piety and Torah observance. This concern prompts Chronicles to whitewash Solomon as well as other biblical figures, such as David. Because Chronicles focuses so intently on glorifying the Temple, it reduces Solomon's role to that of Temple builder. This impulse not only compels the Chronicler to omit negative aspects of Solomon's reign, but it also reduces Solomon's role in the building and dedication of the Temple, elevating David's role instead. In this way, Solomon is celebrated to the extent that he builds the Temple, but even that role is reduced to preserve the primacy of the Temple and not its builder. Chronicles' antiseptic depiction of Solomon creates an opposing alternative to the sinful Solomon of Kings and furthers Solomon's lack of characterization by robbing him of all

dramatic tension. Chronicles' inclusion in Tanakh creates an exegetical precedent allowing subsequent interpreters of Solomon to view Solomon in ideal terms. Despite this invitation, rabbinic interpreters ultimately still need to contend with the Solomon of Kings. Chronicles opens the door to a fully apologetic and redemptive portrayal, but it does not demand it.

Thus, despite Chronicles' radical alteration of Solomon's character, subsequent depictions of Solomon in Tanakh seem to interact primarily with the Solomon of Kings, not Chronicles. As a result, those literary allusions to Solomon tend to be critical. It is not immediately evident whether Psalm 72 offers a laudatory or critical vision of Solomon. However, its depiction of its ideal king as a model of charity and providing for the needy reads as a criticism Solomon who never seems to evince such concerns in either Kings or Chronicles. Similarly, Psalm 127 can be understood as a critique of Solomon's Temple, which was not as God centered as it was Solomon centered. However, any criticism contained in these two psalms is far from overt, and the legacy of these psalms in the subsequent evolution of Jewish understanding of Solomon is minimal. The use of Solomon in Nehemiah, however, is clearly critical, as the author uses Solomon as a negative example of sinful behavior not to emulate. Despite Nehemiah's reliance on the Solomon of Kings to issue its polemic against intermarriage, Nehemiah also exhibits familiarity with the tradition in Chronicles that David and Solomon jointly build the Temple. Thus, we see the influence of Chronicles impacting biblical impressions of Solomon but without cancelling out the negative portrayal of Solomon in Kings. However, like the two Solomonic psalms, the impact of Solomon's appearance in Nehemiah is of minimal consequence to later interpretations of the Solomon narrative. Yet this interplay and coexistence of the two competing biblical portraits of Solomon exhibited in Nehemiah will continue throughout the Jewish reception of Solomon.

The three biblical works attributed to Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, however, have a tremendous impact on subsequent Jewish readings of Solomon. All three works, despite their Solomonic attributions, almost certainly postdate the Solomon narrative in Kings. While Proverbs contains little literary connection to Solomon beyond its appeal to Solomon's reputation for wisdom, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs offer more overt literary references to the Solomon narrative. In addition, both Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs use their opening attributions to Solomon not as historic claims of authorship but rather as invitations to readers to consider Solomon as the subject of these respective works.

In keeping with readings of Ecclesiastes that see the epilogue as a critique of the words of Qohelet, we have read Ecclesiastes as a critique of the Solomon of Kings. Solomon's wisdom is ultimately futile because it does not protect him from sin. The internal contradictions and heterodoxies of Qohelet's words are deliberate. The lack of clarity in his words mimics the lack of clarity in Solomon's character as it appears in Kings. Furthermore, the internal contradictions in Qohelet's words reflect the contradictions and doubts that take place in the human thought process. As such, we can read Ecclesiastes as a deliberate critique of Solomon. Solomon's wisdom not only fails to protect him from sin, but its ability to rationalize behavior serves as a trap for the wise king, paving the way for his downfall. The epilogue warns that wisdom can mislead, and the only proper path is adherence to God's commandments. This is the lesson Solomon fails to heed. This message would have resonated with the postexilic community in Judah who were exhorted to maintain fidelity to Torah law in order to avoid another exile. Thus, like Nehemiah, Ecclesiastes uses Solomon as a negative example of how not to behave. At the same time, Ecclesiastes must contend with Solomon's role as Temple builder and with the centrality of the second Temple to the postexilic community, as reflected in the Book of

Chronicles. Thus, Ecclesiastes employs the Qohelet pseudonym for Solomon, utilizing a name that subtly evokes Solomon's role in building the Temple while also criticizing Solomon for his breach of loyalty to God.

Similarly, we have also read the Song of Songs as a deliberate critique of Solomon. As with Ecclesiastes, the Solomonic attribution and literary references to the Solomon narrative of Kings require a reading of Solomon's role in the Song that extends well beyond that of generic royal figure to whom the male lover can be compared. The negative depiction of Solomon in the Song as spoiled and emasculated not only rules out a reading that identifies Solomon with the male lover, but also requires a reading of Solomon as the villain of the Song, the third party who attempts to stand between the two young lovers by claiming the young woman for his burgeoning harem. Literary references in the Song to Solomon's violation of the three kingly prohibitions strengthen this critical reading. Ultimately, the Song of Song's primary focus is on Solomon and his inability to achieve the level of admiration enjoyed by the young shepherd. This is because the male beloved is really a double for another young shepherd, David. The text of the Song almost explicitly names the beloved David. By portraying David and Solomon as romantic rivals for the love of a single woman, the Song contrasts the virtues of David with Solomon's failings. Solomon falls short of his Davidic potential, abandoning David's loyalty to God in favor of idol worship. The author's purpose in castigating Solomon may have served to temper nostalgia for the Davidic monarchy that was conspicuously lacking in the Jewish return from the Babylonian exile. This portrayal of Solomon as failed acts as a strong corrective to the whitewashed Solomon of Chronicles. Solomon's inability to love a single woman mirrors his inability to remain faithful to the one God, cheapening his love for both women and the divine.

Both Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs may have been written primarily as critiques of Solomon. However, the literary nature of both works obscured this message. Subsequent efforts to understand these books adopted alternate allegorical approaches. Thus, the anti-Solomon intent of both works was lost. Instead of reading the Solomonic attributions as indicators of Solomon's role as subject of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, subsequent Jewish interpretations of these works viewed the attributions as indicators of Solomon's authorship. This understanding of Solomonic authorship, in turn, affected the later rabbinic debates surrounding the status of the Solomonic works. Solomon's attribution placed these works within the wisdom tradition instead of the prophetic tradition, making their inclusion in Tanakh less certain.

As it happens, debates about the canonicity or sacred status of the three Solomonic works ultimately have less to do with their purported Solomonic authorship and more to do with the controversial nature of their content. Setting Proverbs aside, Ecclesiastes borders on the heretical, and the Song of Songs offers provocative sensuality with no overt reference to the divine. While these works may have been initially included in the canon because of their anti-Solomon critiques, this tradition was certainly lost by tannaitic times, when the rabbis began to debate the status of these works. Since these works were most likely already canonized by tannaitic times, the rabbinic debate surrounding Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs probably had more to do with justifying their presence in the canon despite their controversial features. Thus, the rabbis were left to redeem Ecclesiastes through orthodox reinterpretation and the Song of Songs through allegory. Solomon's purported authorship does not aid their sacred status, but conceivably presents an obstacle to rabbinic evaluation of these works as divinely inspired. In the end, however, Solomon's authorship is far less important than the content of the book in

question and whether the rabbis can impose Torah piety upon it. Similarly, rabbinic discussions of suppressing or hiding Solomon's works probably reflect rabbinic efforts to reframe the problematic aspects of these works, with Solomon's purported authorship playing little role one way or the other.

Ultimately, Solomon's role in canonization and the sanctity of the books attributed to him remains minimal. However, the canonization of the three books attributed to him and the rabbinic determination that all three are divinely inspired and sacred has profound consequences for Jewish perceptions of Solomon. The fact that Solomon becomes accepted as a recipient of divine inspiration raises Solomon's status. This determination implies that Solomon must have been worthy to receive the divine inspiration through which he composed his three works. At the same time, the rabbinic consensus that Solomon receives divine inspiration makes his sinful conduct all the more difficult to understand. While Chronicles could merely ignore the problematic aspects of Solomon's reign in order to glorify his role as Temple builder, rabbinic literature is not the product of a single voice. As a result, rabbinic literature approaches the contradiction between Solomon the sinner and Solomon the author of divinely inspired works with a multiplicity of responses.

In addition, rabbinic responses to Solomon emerge from the milieu of treatments during the Second Temple period and subsequent Christian writings. In parallel to the historic Solomon depicted in Tanakh, the esoteric Solomon emerges during this period. Solomon *magus* gains tremendous popularity in Jewish, pagan, and Christian circles, especially in his role as exorcist, a practical concern for people of the time. While this esoteric Solomon continues to enjoy tremendous popularity among Christians, rabbinic literature makes a concerted effort to contain and dispel Solomon's esoteric reputation.

Thus, in examining major midrashic traditions regarding Solomon, we noted a consistent rabbinic attempt to recast Solomon's wisdom as Torah wisdom. In addition, while the rabbis allow that Solomon experiences divine inspiration, they interpret the products of that inspiration as works that allow Solomon to interpret the Torah in the model of rabbinic exegesis. In this way, the rabbis rein in Solomon's wisdom to an acceptable form within the scope of Torah wisdom. Giving Solomon credit for divine inspiration provides the rabbis with a tool to exculpate some of Solomon's questionable behavior, such as judging without adhering to judicial procedure. Solomon's divine inspiration also represents a level of communication with the divine below prophecy, which allows the rabbis to explain the controversial nature of the Solomonic works while still attributing them with divinity. At the same time, Solomon's divine wisdom makes his sins all the more problematic. Thus, the rabbis must conclude that Solomon's sins come as the result of his pride in his wisdom and his attempts to outsmart God.

Rabbinic attempts to argue that Solomon never sinned ultimately fail in the face of scriptural scrutiny. While many rabbinic voices engage in apologetics, seeking to minimize Solomon's participation in idolatry, they cannot completely exculpate him. The impulse to defend Solomon is strongest in the face of his idolatry. Rabbinic sources are much more comfortable with his other sins. While this apologetic tendency may reflect concern with countering pagan claims of religious superiority, it may also be a consequence of the rabbinic understanding of Solomon authoring his three works through divine inspiration and the inability to comprehend how the Solomon who experienced divine inspiration could commit idolatry.

Thus, midrashim that juxtapose Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh with the dedication of the Temple have no qualms about holding Solomon responsible for the ultimate destruction of the Temple. However, they are unwilling to impute to him direct participation in

idol worship. In this sense, the daughter of Pharaoh becomes a proxy for Solomon's idol worship. In sharp contrast, we saw *Exodus Rabbah* 15:26, which, like Chronicles, casts Solomon as the height of Israelite achievement and perfection. However, this tradition stands apart from the more dominant critical or even apologetic appraisals of Solomon. The rabbinic willingness to blame Solomon for the destruction of the Temple reflects a level of rabbinic skepticism regarding the Temple. For this reason, the rabbis generally decline to follow Chronicles' lead, but are willing to castigate Solomon for his sins despite his building the Temple. If anything, the rabbis sense that Solomon's efforts to build the Temple are less for God's glory and more for his own.

Rabbinic criticism of Solomon reaches its height with the midrashic tradition of rabbinic efforts to deny Solomon a place in the world to come. The rabbis ultimately concede their lack of jurisdiction to rule on the matter, but these traditions imply that their efforts are justified on the merits of the case. Solomon does not deserve heavenly reward. Presumably, only Solomon's idol worship would warrant such a severe punishment, yet the rabbis still refuse to expressly state that Solomon worshipped foreign gods, omitting the nature of his sin from the discussion. Still, this tradition is as close as the rabbis will come to articulating Solomon's idol worship, and it constitutes castigation of the highest order.

Rabbinic legends about Solomon's losing his throne, on the other hand, pave the path for Solomon's repentance. Since Solomon's error is one of pride in his wisdom, the loss of his throne forces Solomon to learn humility. This sin of pride is reflected in the Ashmedai legend, as Solomon relies on his mastery over demons for his greater aggrandizement. The Ashmedai legend, as it appears in the Talmud, also serves to establish the primacy of the Torah and rabbinic authority over that of the king and esoteric wisdom, as Solomon suffers for his attempts

to control demons. While the Ashmedai legend portrays Solomon as a sinner who is subjected to appropriate punishment, it also serves to mitigate the severity of his sins. Solomon is punished for his pride, not idolatry. Furthermore, in the talmudic version, Solomon returns to his throne chastened. In this way, the Talmud depicts a Solomon who has learned his lesson.

The association of Solomon with Agur and Lemuel of Proverbs also functions as rabbinic criticism of Solomon. Solomon is castigated for forgetting God and trying to outsmart His Torah. Midrashic tradition places the rebuke of Lemuel's mother into the mouth of Bathsheba, allowing her to criticize Solomon for allowing his foreign wives to have such great influence over him. At the same time, the rabbinic rendering of Solomon as Lemuel and Agur also creates a scriptural basis for Solomon's repentance. Agur acknowledges the futility of human wisdom in the face of divine wisdom, affirming Ecclesiastes' conclusion that adherence to covenantal piety is the sole role of man. By placing Agur's words in Solomon's mouth, the rabbis portray Solomon voicing contrition in a way that never occurs in the Book of Kings.

Other efforts to redeem Solomon through repentance occur within rabbinic literature. Discussions of when Solomon wrote his three books often place their writing and attendant divine inspiration after Solomon's sins. This gift of divine inspiration implies Solomon's repentance. In addition, midrashic tradition portrays the pious conclusion of Ecclesiastes as an expression of Solomon's contrition. In this way, Solomon's divine inspiration, rather than making his sins more difficult to comprehend, functions as a sign of God's forgiveness following his repentance. Thus, the rabbis use Scripture to resolve the sins imputed to Solomon through Scripture. Ironically, the very works that were written to castigate Solomon, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, become the instruments through which the rabbis redeem Solomon and offer proof of his repentance.

Rabbinic literature gives voice to multiple opinions on any given topic, Solomon proving no exception. There are midrashim that praise Solomon, midrashim that seek to minimize his problems, and midrashim that fully castigate him. Very few midrashim choose to ignore the problems Solomon poses. In this way, they interact with the Solomon of Kings and decline Chronicles' invitation to whitewash Solomon. Rabbinic willingness to criticize Solomon does avoid directly accusing Solomon of idolatry. However, this may reflect an inability to square Solomon's divine inspiration with worship of pagan gods. In the end, this problem is resolved by viewing Solomon's divine inspiration as evidence of his repentance.

While receiving less esteem in contemporary scholarship, the Aramaic targumim quietly played an outsized role in shaping Jewish perceptions of Solomon. Their popularity both among general readers as well as the Jewish medieval exegetes reveals their influence. While the Targum to Kings is not particularly apologetic to Solomon, it does credit Solomon with prophecy, including the ability to see future events. Similarly, Targum Qohelet repeatedly credits Solomon with prophetic insight into future events. Still, Targum Qohelet is willing to criticize Solomon and describe his sins and consequent punishment. Targum Qohelet exhibits little discomfort with the contrast between its prophetic Solomon and its sinful Solomon, perhaps relying on the tradition that Solomon writes Ecclesiastes after his sins.

Like Targum Qohelet, Targum Song of Songs portrays Solomon as a prophet. However, Targum Song of Songs' treatment of Solomon is unique in that it casts him as the prophetic narrator of the Song, which, according to the Targum, describes the history of the relationship between God and Israel from the exodus from Egypt until messianic times. For Targum Song of Songs, Solomon represents an ideal, his reign marking a time of peace and perfection under Torah law. As such, the Targum presents Solomon in glowing terms, never addressing his faults

or sins. Thus, Targum Song of Songs harkens back to the Solomon of Chronicles who is lionized in his role as Temple builder and essentially cleansed of all his faults through omission. However, in addition, the Targumist also idealizes Solomon in his role as monarch over the unified Israelite kingdom. In this sense, Solomon represents the messianic ideal to which the Targumist wishes to return. As the king who presides over a unified Israel during a time when the Temple stood as the center of the Israelite connection to God, Solomon becomes a template for the Targumist's image of messianic perfection. As such, there is no room for the failed Solomon of Kings in the Targumist's vision.

Targum Sheni to Esther also offers a cleansed image of Solomon. Unlike the other targumim, and unlike midrashic literature, Targum Sheni uncritically celebrates an esoteric image of Solomon that gives him power over animals and demons. This departure from the general rabbinic effort to minimize and subvert the popular image of Solomon as magician and exorcist brings Targum Sheni closer in line with the sensibilities of the Qur'an with which it shares many narrative features. This, in turn, highlights the process of literary sharing from common traditions that permeates so much of the literature of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam during this period. The Qur'an's depiction of Solomon, while also celebrating his esoteric powers, emphasizes an Islamic portrait of Solomon as a ruler whose authority is justified by his righteousness and fidelity to God. The Qur'an's Solomon bears the marks of other rabbinic legends, but any potential sinfulness is quickly resolved with Solomon's repentance and unwavering faith in God. Thus, the Qur'an transforms Solomon into an Islamic ruler who prefigures Muhammad. Despite Targum Sheni's portrayal of an esoteric Solomon, this image does not gain ascendancy and is largely absent from Jewish medieval exegesis.

Targum Song of Songs' and Targum Sheni's cleansed Solomon stands apart from the bulk of Jewish exegesis on Solomon up to that point. While biblical treatments (with the notable exception of Chronicles) and midrashic treatments of Solomon exhibit both apologetic and critical approaches toward Solomon, these targumim abandon criticism entirely. While Chronicles' whitewashing of Solomon does not seem to have strongly influenced subsequent readings of Solomon, Targum Song of Songs seems to have a much broader impact. The Targum's wide distribution ultimately shapes both popular perceptions of Solomon while strongly influencing many medieval commentators. Solomon's popularity in the Middle Ages may owe much to the popularity of Targum Song of Songs.

Targum Song of Songs enjoyed enduring influence by virtue of Rashi's use of the Targum in his commentary to the Song of Songs. Rashi's appealing blend of *peshat* analysis combined with judicious use of midrash made his commentaries on Tanakh extremely popular. His influence on the popular understanding of Scripture endured long after the decline of the *peshat* movement. As with rabbinic literature and Targum Song of Songs, Rashi had no inkling that the Song could have been written as a critique of Solomon. The presumption that Solomon wrote the Song made this concept unthinkable. While Rashi imposes his own interpretative framework onto the Targum's, his reliance on the Targum perpetuates its wholly positive image of Solomon. Through Rashi or independently, the Targum's historical allegorical approach to the Song gained dominance not only in Jewish understanding of the Song but also among Christian exegetes of the late Middle Ages. This cleansing of Solomon through the Song was also furthered by subsequent Jewish exegetical approaches. Allegorical readings of the Song by Jewish philosophers and kabbalistic mystics remove the Song from the context of a historical Solomon, reinforcing the image of the flawless Solomon established by Targum Song of Songs.

Thus, the Song of Songs evolves from a text written to excoriate Solomon to a text that establishes Solomon as an ideal king, as a prophet, and as Israel's comforter.

Unlike the Song of Songs, however, the Book of Kings forced the medieval Jewish commentators to confront Solomon's sins. The medieval commentators, while exhibiting strong apologetic tendencies, are still willing to concede many of Solomon's failings as depicted in Kings. This evinces a recognition on the part of the commentators that Solomon is less than perfect. Thus, we see attempts by the medieval exegetes to temper the extent of Solomon's wisdom so that it does not surpass that of Moses. While they mitigate the severity of Solomon's marriages to foreign women through halakhic discourse, the Jewish medieval exegetes acknowledge the problems those marriages pose. The medieval exegetes are also willing to label Solomon's violations of the three kingly prohibitions as sinful even as they seek to mitigate the severity of those transgressions. However, the medieval exegetes curtail their criticism when it comes to Solomon's apostasy. This tendency extends beyond the midrashic hesitance to avoid expressly accusing Solomon of idolatry. Many of the rabbis of the Talmud and midrash were still willing to imply that Solomon had betrayed God. In contrast, the medieval commentators almost universally reject the contention that Solomon directly participates in worshipping foreign gods. Even those exegetes with reverence for *peshat* find it impossible to implicate Solomon in direct participation in idolatry. As voiced by Gersonides, this incomprehensibility is a product of Solomon's intimate relationship with God, his role as a prophet and a collaborator with the divine in the composition of his three works. In this way, the Jewish medieval understanding of Solomon's role in the Song of Songs directly impacts medieval understandings of his sins in Kings, making his apostasy unthinkable.

The Jewish impulse to defend Solomon in the Middle Ages is in keeping with the general impulse to defend biblical figures in the face of Christian domination. Some medieval Jewish philosophers saw Solomon as an early Jewish prototype of Plato's philosopher-king. The model of the philosopher-king served as a tempting fit for Solomon. However, by imputing onto Solomon the perfect ideal qualities of the philosopher-king, these philosophers render Solomon an idealized facsimile of the historic Solomon. Christian scholars also attempted to cast Solomon in this role of the ideal monarch, with the Solomonic works often serving as justifications for lauding Solomon despite his record in Kings. Thus, once again, we see the influence of the Solomonic works on perceptions of Solomon, despite his clear failings in the Book of Kings, this time in Christendom. Ultimately, one can trace the fate of Solomon through the fate of the works attributed to him, especially the Song of Songs. While nothing can completely eradicate the Book of Kings' depiction of the failed Solomon, popular notions of Solomon can be refocused, leaving Jewish perceptions with a starkly distinct image of the wise, prophetic king. By the Middle Ages, Jewish perceptions of Solomon took a much more positive turn, leaving a legacy of Solomon as a Jewish hero.

Our study of the reception of Solomon through Jewish interpretation over the centuries has also allowed us to draw some conclusions regarding the development of Jewish exegesis from biblical times through the Middle Ages. Even in our consideration of Kings, which we have taken as our source text, we can consider the multivalent depictions of Solomon's character and reflect on Tanakh's nuanced relationship with its protagonists. This may be the result of the preservation of opposing traditions, the work of subversive scribes, or the layering of multiple redaction levels. However, Tanakh interacts with the traditions it preserves in such a way that it portrays its actors as remarkably human, which in and of itself may be deemed exegetical. This

being the case, readers of subsequent interpretation need to be sensitive to exegetical attempts to veer from this portrayal and to engage in apologetics.

Chronicles' whitewashing of David and Solomon stands as a marked exception to Tanakh's nuanced portrayal of figures. This break from biblical precedent, albeit done for political and theological reasons, renders Chronicles in many ways more exegetical than scriptural. This may explain why few subsequent exegetical treatments of Solomon rely on the image of Solomon provided by the Chronicler. The exegetical approach of Chronicles, which essentially whitewashes problematic biblical figures, does not emerge as a dominant interpretive strategy despite apologetic impulses throughout Jewish exegetical history. Rather, Jewish exegetes feel compelled to respond to Tanakh, including its troubling elements.

Our discussion of Ecclesiastes and the Songs of Songs as literature with a critical purpose renders them much more exegetical than is often thought. These works do not merely engage in inner-biblical allusion. They are responding directly to problems raised by earlier biblical works. However, these books choose to do so through literature, one in the guise of wisdom literature and the other through poetry. Their willingness to criticize Solomon implies that the apologetic tendency that pervades later Jewish exegesis may not have been a factor when these books were composed. On the other hand, the veiled nature of their criticism, which is masked by the literary quality of both books, suggests that they were composed with sensitivity to popular sentiments, indicating that people were already aggrandizing biblical figures.

On a number of occasions we have discussed the relationship between Jewish exegesis and Christian interpretive traditions. While scholarship has established that Jews and Christians were cognizant of each others' works, the nature of that relationship is often quite difficult to define. Thus, we can search for Christian influence or anti-Christian polemics in Jewish

exegesis, but such influences are often difficult to identify definitively. Furthermore, it is not clear why a Jewish response to Christian interpretation should take the form of apologetics versus polemics or the other way around. However, this uncertainty does not negate the fact that Jewish interpretation does at times reflect consciousness of Christian exegesis. Furthermore, we can also note the points of departure between the two interpretive communities. In our particular study, we have noted the disparate views of rabbinic exegetes and Christian authorities toward esotericism. Whether these distinctions are conscious efforts by one group to distance itself from the other or whether they merely reflect disparate theological viewpoints is less clear.

With regard to rabbinic exegesis, we noted a number of trends. For example, we examined rabbinic distrust of non-rabbinic wisdom as well as a general willingness to recast biblical figures in their own image. This is consistent with the rabbinic rejection of esotericism as well as rabbinic elevation of Torah learning over other types of wisdom. We also discussed rabbinic attitudes toward the Temple. Somewhat surprisingly, the rabbis of late antiquity placed less value in the Temple than in adherence to halakhah.

While classic rabbinic literature displays an apologetic impulse to defend revered biblical figures, it also exhibits a willingness to criticize them. This mixture of responses is the result of the multitude of rabbinic voices that make up the vast corpus of rabbinic literature. However, what is notable is the rabbinic comfort with the coexistence of these varying opinions, even within midrashic exegesis in which disagreement is not a key element of development. This tolerance for disagreement allows for tremendous interpretive freedom. The rabbis can even go so far as to entertain thoughts of who should be excluded from the world to come. At the same time, there seems to be a limit to how far the rabbis are willing to pursue criticism, evincing a

basic reverence for even flawed biblical figures. This is consistent with rabbinic views on repentance and rehabilitation.

In our discussion of the political and historic motivations for rabbinic exegetical positions, we encountered the pitfalls of trying to identify historic and geographical trends within rabbinic literature. Such trends fall prey to the subjective reading of the researcher. Even more problematic was the attempt to attribute interpretive attitudes to political considerations. The conclusions reached in these endeavors often emerge as tenuous and self-confirming. Because rabbinic literature represents so many voices and attitudes, scholars are often better served by evaluating rabbinic opinions at face value.

Our discussion of the targumim revealed that some of their exegetical strategies were distinct from midrashic interpretation beyond the differences of form between the two genres. We discussed the prevailing stance that midrash and targum share common midrashic traditions. However, we witnessed certain trends within the targumim that were largely absent from the midrashim, especially regarding prophetic status. This opens the question of who wrote the targumim. Were they rabbis? Or were they a distinct group? On the one hand they often espouse an orthodox piety consistent with rabbinic attitudes. On the other hand, they seem to embrace more apologetic tendencies as well as a greater enthusiasm for popular legend and even, on occasion, esotericism, as in Targum Sheni.

Our discussion of Targum Sheni and its relationship with the Qur'an and Islamic traditions raised many of the same issues as did our discussion regarding Christianity. The relationship between Jewish traditions and Qur'anic material is unclear. Clearly, Jewish legends, many of which but not all predate Islam, find their way into the Qur'an and later Islamic writings. However, it is unclear whether those legends came directly from Jewish sources or

traveled in a more attenuated fashion through the popular lore of the Near East. In turn, it is difficult to say what effect Islamic attitudes toward biblical figures had on Jewish exegesis. While Islam, like Christianity, tends to take a more apologetic attitude toward its scriptural figures, it is unclear to what extent this may have influenced Jews to take proprietary pride in these figures and defend them against Christological or Islamicized treatment.

Finally, in our exploration of medieval exegesis, we witnessed the tension between apologetic tendencies and adherence to textual fidelity. While we attempted to explain the commentators' motivations for defending Solomon, their inconsistent treatment of David and Solomon revealed an exegetical willingness to sacrifice methodological consistency for theological concerns. Thus, loyalty to *peshat* interpretation, for example, could be sacrificed when the *peshat* demanded theologically untenable readings of Scripture, even if that reading became untenable because of midrashic traditions. Thus, by the Middle Ages we see the rise of greater apologetic tendencies despite the diminished reliance on midrash, which, due to its multivalent nature, preserves a wide range of attitudes both apologetic and critical.

In conclusion, I wish to turn momentarily back to Solomon. Despite Solomon's popular redemption, his darker side still lurks under the surface. As I recall my pre-school graduation, it seemed to me at the time that the bee was the real hero of the story. All of the children wanted the role of the bee in the play. The bee is the one who solves the riddle, not Solomon. Upon further reflection, the Solomon of that story does not seem particularly wise at all. He does not possess the creative imagination to perceive how a bee, even one that talks, could ever serve any useful purpose. If anything, the story feels like a maladapted version of Aesop's fable of the Lion and the Mouse spliced into the Solomon legend. The "Solomon and the Bee" story has

appeared in innumerable forms in children's literature.⁷³⁸ It is adapted from a story written by Hayyim Nahman Bialik. Still, even these sanitized children's tales are anchored in the biblical Solomon narrative. Solomon's ability to speak with the bee stems from his special knowledge of nature and animals. The bee helps Solomon within the context of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon. Perhaps the story, which presumes Solomon's wisdom without any evidence of that wisdom, is subtly critical of Solomon. The story's Solomon may be clever at solving riddles, but he is clueless with regard to the value of mercy. A simple insect teaches the wisest of kings a lesson in humility. Thus, despite centuries of apologetics and recasting of Solomon's character into myriad roles, the Solomon of Kings stubbornly persists casting a pall over the mythological Solomon of legend.

⁷³⁸ Three different fully illustrated versions are currently available in paperback on Amazon at the time of this writing.

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