

INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES AND PRIZE ESSAYS

AUTHOR Stephen Wise Goodman

TITLE "The Image of Solomon in the Rabbinic Literature"

TYPE OF THESIS: Ph.D. ☐ D.H.L. ☐ Rabbinic ☒

Master's [] Prize Essay []

1. May circulate [☒]) Not necessary
) for Ph.D.
2. Is restricted [☐] for years.) thesis

Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses or prize essays for a period of no more than ten years.

I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

- [illegible]

4/4/78
Date

Stephen W. Goodman
Signature of Author

Library
Record

Microfilmed 7/5/78
Date 7/5/78

Alding Steiner
Signature of Library Staff Member

THE IMAGE OF SOLOMON IN THE RABBINIC LITERATURE

STEPHEN W. GOODMAN

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1978

Referee, Prof. Edward A. Goldman

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was my great good fortune to have the help of many good people in the completion of this thesis.

Phyllis Cohen graciously accepted the arduous task of typing the bulk of the thesis in its first draft. She was diligent in her work on my behalf, and her good spirits encouraged me in my work. Robbin Barg kindly agreed to type the final chapters. She, too, willingly gave up her precious time on my behalf. These two skillful people saved my life.

Barbara Schooler suffered through the protracted agony of typing the final copy. The following pages testify to her skill, her perseverance, and her unending patience with me.

Dr. Edward Goldman shares any credit due to this thesis. His assistance in matters of research procedure, translation, organization, and presentation was essential. He set aside time from an overcrowded schedule to give me and my work his careful attention. His unfailingly realistic counsel saved me from disaster. He was patient, and he cared. These things I will remember.

Rabbi Kenneth Ehrlich exerted himself to win me the additional time necessary for the completion of this work. I am deeply grateful to him, and to the members of the Committee on Academic Affairs, for their patience.

The "publication" of this thesis has been made possible in part by a generous grant from the Rayna and Alfred Goodman Scholarship Fund. I joyfully acknowledge that this is not the only debt I owe them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Digest	i
Introduction	ii
Chapter 1--Solomon and the Temple	
Section I--The Significance of Solomon's Temple	1
Section II--The Construction of the Temple	10
Section III--Miracles within the Temple	18
Section IV--The Vessels of the Temple	21
Section V--Solomon's Difficulties Bringing Up the Ark ...	28
Section VI--The Dedication of the Temple	34
Section VII--Solomon's Reward for Building the Temple ...	44
Section VIII--Summary	46
Chapter 2--Solomon's Sins	
Section I--Solomon's Three Sins	48
Section II--Solomon's Wives	56
Section III--Before the Sins and After	67
Chapter 3--Solomon's Reign	
Section I--Solomon's Ascent to the Throne, the Extent of His Power, and His Loss of Power ...	70
Section II--Solomon's Dominion over Animals and Demons ..	85
Chapter 4--Solomon's Throne	107
Chapter 5--Solomon and Ruth	118
Chapter 6--Solomon's Wisdom	
Section I--Solomon's Request and Receipt of Wisdom	125
Section II--Solomon's Wisdom as Judge	129
Section III--General Descriptions of Solomon's Wisdom ...	145
Section IV--Solomon's Wisdom Literature	149

Section V--Solomon's Knowledge of Nature	153
Section VI--Solomon as a Teacher of Wisdom	158
Section VII--Solomon's Knowledge of Torah	166
Section VIII--The Limits of Solomon's Wisdom	171
Section IX--Good and Bad Aspects of Solomon's Wisdom	179
Chapter 7--Solomon's Books	
Section I--General Considerations of Solomon's Writings .	182
Section II--Solomon and Proverbs	189
Section III--Solomon and the Song of Songs	194
Section IV--Solomon and Ecclesiastes	206
Chapter 8--Solomon's Wealth	222
Chapter 9--Solomon and David	
Section I--Solomon, David and the Temple	231
Section II--Solomon and David Viewed Competitively	240
Section III--Solomon and David Viewed As In Harmony	245
Section IV--Solomon and the Death of David	253
Section V--Summary	255
Chapter 10--Solomon and His Contemporaries	256
Chapter 11--Solomon's Names	272
Chapter 12--Short Subjects	
Section I--Solomon and the Halacha	278
Section II--Miscellaneous Midrashim and Addenda	282
Conclusion	287
Bibliography	289

DIGEST

This work is a collection and analysis of midrashim about King Solomon. In the biblical accounts of Solomon's life (I Kings 1-11 and I Chron. 28-II Chron. 9), five elements stand out--his wisdom, his wealth, his power, his building of the Temple and his sin of idolatry in his old age. All these elements raised questions for the rabbis: How wise was Solomon, this wisest of all men? How wealthy was he, this wealthiest of men? How powerful was this most powerful of men? How did he manage to build the Temple, a transcendent structure? How could he have sinned so grievously, he who was so wise, he who had built the Temple?

In the course of their exploration of these problems, the rabbis raised and answered other problems as well: How could Solomon, the greatest of Israelite kings, have been a descendant of a Moabite woman? How did he get along with his equally illustrious father? How did his legendary throne look? What wisdom did Solomon teach in his three canonical books? What did all his names and nicknames signify? What really went on between Solomon and his contemporaries?

Out of their extensive commentary upon Solomon's life and character there emerges a full, rich portrait of a spectacular and multi-faceted personality. As a figure of heroic dimensions, Solomon was used by the rabbis to illustrate both the best and worst possibilities of humankind. On the whole, the rabbinic view of Solomon is positive, although his sins deeply colored their opinion. But it was this very duality, the builder of the Temple worshipping idols, which fascinated the rabbis and made Solomon a perfect vehicle for expressing their many various homiletical lessons.

INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this work was to gather, to analyze, and to draw conclusions concerning all the midrashim on King Solomon which are generally available. In order to locate the material, I consulted Hasidah's Ishei Ha-tanach, Gross' Otsar Ha-aggadah, Torah Ha-ketuvah Veha-mesurah, the indices to the Soncino Talmud and the Soncino Midrash Rabbah, Ginzberg's Legends of the Jews, and the indices of other midrashic works available in translation, such as Braude's translations of Pesikta deRav Kahana, Midrash Tehillim and Pesikta Rabbati. Most of the midrashim are Tannaitic or Amoraic, although I have also included later materials, particularly from the Zohar. I did exclude, however, the non-rabbinic sources used by Ginzberg.

Most of the translations are mine. For Aramaic passages, I usually resorted to available translations. All of the Zohar passages are quoted from the Soncino translation. I have indicated in the notes all those instances in which the translation is not mine.

The biblical quotations are taken from the 1917 JPS translation. Very occasionally I have altered the translation to fit the context.

In ordering the material, I have chosen to begin with the basic polarity in Solomon's life, as seen by the rabbis, i.e., his building of the Temple on the one hand, and his worshipping idols on the other. This duality runs throughout practically all the rest of the midrashim.

SOLOMON AND THE TEMPLE

I

Solomon, like every other creature, was assigned a destiny at Creation. His destiny was to be chief among builders.¹ He would achieve this distinction, of course, for building the Temple. That achievement is in fact the high point of world history, the completion of the work of Creation:

THUS ALL THE WORK /THAT KING SOLOMON WROUGHT IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD/ WAS FINISHED (I Kings 7:51). "The work" is not what's written here, but rather, "all the work," meaning the work of the six days of Creation, as in, /HE RESTED/ FROM ALL HIS WORK WHICH GOD, IN CREATING, WAS MAKING (Gen. 2:3). "Had made" /עשה/ is not what's written here, but rather, "was making" /לעשות/, meaning there was other work remaining. When Solomon came and built the Temple, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Now the work of heavens and earth is finished"--THUS ALL THE WORK WAS FINISHED. For that reason he was called Solomon /שלמה/, because the Holy One, blessed be He, finished /השלים/ the work of the six days of Creation through his achievement.²

The completion of the Temple had cosmic significance for man as well as God, as the following midrash explains:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created His world..., He came to the eve of Shabbat and formed man. Whence did He form him? The earth became pregnant /ותעברה/, and man issued forth from it, as it is said, ויתעבר ה' בי (Deut. 3:26) /here interpreted, "The Lord caused me to be impregnated"/. After his formation, /man/ strove constantly to create the Temple....As it is written in the Torah, IF A WOMAN BE DELIVERED, AND BEAR A MAN-CHILD, THEN SHE SHALL BE UNCLEAR SEVEN DAYS; AS IN THE DAYS OF THE IMPURITY OF HER SICKNESS SHALL SHE BE UNCLEAR (Lev. 12:2). The earth, from which man was formed, can be compared to the woman who has borne a man-child

1. Esther Rabbah, Introduction 10.

2. Pesikta Rabbati 6, p. 25a; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 6, section 186, p. 376a.

and is made impure for seven days and who seeks to "continue in the blood of purification for thirty-three days" (Lev. 12:4). Likewise the earth was made impure until the completion of thirty-three generations. These are they: from Adam to Noah, ten generations; from Noah to Abraham, ten generations; from Abraham to Judah, three generations; from Judah to Solomon, ten generations, making thirty-three generations. Then Solomon came and built the Temple.³

Solomon thus completed the work of Creation by making the earth pure.

The Temple served as the purifying agent.

This idea of Solomon's perfecting Creation is expanded greatly in the mystical scheme of the Zohar. There, R. Jose also adds the idea that, in response to the perfection of the day, Solomon composed the most perfect of songs, the Song of Songs:

R. Jose thereupon began to speak on the words: THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS SOLOMON'S (Song 1:1). Said he: 'This song King Solomon poured forth when the Temple was erected and all the worlds, above and below, had reached their perfect consummation. And although concerning the exact time of its singing there is some difference of opinion among the members of the Fellowship, we may be certain that it was not sung until that time of absolute completion, when the Moon--the Shekinah--came to her fulness and was revealed in the full perfection of her radiance, and when the Temple had been erected in the likeness of the Temple that is above. The Holy One, blessed be He, then experienced such joy as He had not known since the creation of the world. When Moses set up the Tabernacle in the wilderness, another such was raised in the heavenly spheresBut when the first Temple was completed another Temple was erected at the same time, which was a centre for all the worlds, shedding radiance upon all things and giving light to all the spheres. Then the world was firmly established, and all the supernal casements were opened to pour forth light, and all the worlds experienced such joy as had never been known to them before, and celestial and terrestrial beings alike broke forth in song. And the song which they sang is the "Song of Songs....King David sang "A song of

3. Aggadat Aggadot 77.

degrees"; King Solomon sang "the Song of Songs". Now what is the difference between the two? Do we not interpret both titles to signify one and the same thing? Verily, this is so, for both things are certainly one, but in the days of David all the singers of the spheres were not yet set in their rightful places to chant the praises of their King, because the Temple was not as yet in existence. For, as on earth, the Levitic singers are divided into groups, so it is likewise above, and the upper correspond to the lower. But not before the Temple was erected did they assume these their due places, and the lamp which before gave no light began then to shed radiance abroad, and then this song was sung to the glory of the Supernal King, the "King to whom peace belongs". This song is superior to all the hymns of praise which had ever been sung before. The day on which this hymn was revealed on earth was perfect in all things, and therefore the song is holy of holies. It is written in the Book of Adam that on the day when the Temple would be erected the Patriarchs would awaken song both above and below. Not that they would sing themselves, but they would rouse to song those mighty singers who preside over all worlds. On that day, it is said, Jacob the "perfect" one arose and entered the Garden of Eden and caused it also to sing, and all the spices of the Garden likewise....On the day when this song was revealed the Shekinah descended to earth, as it is written, AND THE PRIESTS COULD NOT STAND TO MINISTER BECAUSE OF THE CLOUD. Why? Because THE GLORY OF THE LORD HAD FILLED THE HOUSE OF THE LORD (I Kings 8:11). On that day this hymn was revealed, and Solomon sang in the power of the Holy Spirit this song wherein is to be found the summary of the whole Torah.¹⁴

The Song of Songs is seen here as a result of the completion of the Temple and the perfection of the world. It is seen soon after as a cause, along with the Temple, of that perfection. Love imagery here prevails:

4. Zohar, Shemot 143a-144a (Soncino IV, pp. 3-5,6). The origin of the Song of Songs is discussed in Chapter 7, pp. 182-5, 194ff.

King David and Solomon his son sang with quite different purposes. David endeavored to prepare the virgins (the celestial grades) and to adorn them for the Matrona's presence so that She and her maidens might be manifested in beauty and grace. When Solomon came he found the Matrona and the virgins thus adorned, so he in turn aspired to lead the Bride to the Bridegroom. He brought the Bridegroom to the place where beneath the marriage canopy the Bride awaited Him, and drew them together with words of love, that they might be united as One, in one perfection, in perfect love: Therefore Solomon produced a more sublime song than all other men. Moses, by building the Tabernacle, brought about the union of the Matrona with the world here below, Solomon brought about the perfect union of the Matrona with the Bridegroom above: he first led Him to the Canopy, and then brought them both down to this world and prepared a habitation for them in the Sanctuary which he built....No man since Adam was first created has ever brought about love and union above except King Solomon, who, as we have said, first prepared that union and then invited the Bridegroom and the Bride to the House which he prepared for them. Blessed are David and Solomon his son who have furthered the Supernal Union. Since the day when the Holy One said to the Moon, Go and make Thyself small, She was never again joined in perfect union with the Sun until Solomon came.⁵

Whether the Song is seen as a result or a precipitant of the perfection of Creation, the Temple remains the central and essential symbol of that perfection. Consequently, when the Temple was destroyed, that perfection was shattered, and Lamentations was sung.⁶

Two concrete signs that Solomon's Temple had brought the Creation to perfection were the sweet fragrance that filled the world at its

5. *Ibid.*, 144b (bottom)-145a (Soncino IV, pp. 9-10). The relative roles of David and Solomon in building the Temple are discussed in Chapter 9, section I.

6. *Ibid.*, 143b (Soncino IV, p. 5).

completion,⁷ and the cessation of the yearly floods which had afflicted the world until that time.⁸ The latter notion is based on a pun on the name of the month in which the Temple was dedicated:

You find that in spite of /God's oath never to bring another flood/, forty days every year the same waters would leave their mark on the world, until Solomon arose and built the Temple. Then those forty days ceased, as it is said, AND IN THE ELEVENTH YEAR, IN THE MONTH BUL (I Kings 6:38). What is the meaning of IN THE MONTH BUL / בול /? In the month when people keep the cattle indoors /because of the rains/ /שבוללין לבהמות/.⁹

While Solomon's Temple had a beneficial impact on all the world, it brought special benefits to the people of Israel. It served, first of all, as a vehicle of atonement for them:

Let the beloved the son of the beloved come and build the beloved for the Beloved in the portion of the beloved that the beloved may receive atonement therein. "Let the beloved / יד יד / come"--that is King Solomon, as it is written, AND HE SENT BY THE HAND OF NATHAN THE PROPHET, AND HE CALLED HIS NAME JEDIDIAH / יד יד /, FOR THE LORD'S SAKE (II Sam. 12:25). "The son of the beloved"--that is, the son of Abraham, as it is written, WHAT HATH MY BELOVED TO DO IN MY HOUSE? (Jer. 11:15). "And build the beloved"--that is, the Temple, as it is written, HOW LOVELY ARE THY TABERNACLES! (Ps. 84:2). "For the Beloved"--that is, the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written, LET ME SING OF MY BELOVED (Is. 5:1). "In the portion of the beloved"--that is, Benjamin, as it is said, OF BENJAMIN HE SAID, THE BELOVED OF THE LORD SHALL DWELL IN SAFETY BY HIM (Deut. 33:12). "That the beloved may receive atonement therein"--that is, Israel, as it is written,

7. Pesikta Rabbati 20, p. 96b.

8. Tanhuma, Noah 11; Tanhuma Buber, Noah 17, p. 43.

9. Ibid.; ibid. In Tanhuma, Solomon prays for the cessation of the floods. In Pesikta Rabbati 6, p. 24b, the month of Bul / בול / is explained as the month in which God brought the flood /המבול/.

I HAVE GIVEN THE DEARLY BELOVED OF MY SOUL
INTO THE HAND OF HER ENEMIES (Jer. 12:7).¹⁰

The Temple also served Israel as a protection against their enemies:

KING SOLOMON MADE HIMSELF A PALANQUIN (Song 3:9). The passage, FAIR IN SITUATION, THE JOY OF THE WHOLE EARTH (Ps. 48:3), refers to this. It is the Temple. Why is it compared to a sword /actually referring to Song 3:7-8, the litter of Solomon surrounded by mighty men each armed with a sword/? Because the Temple was the sword of Israel. As long as the Temple was in existence, no enemy could rule over them, as it is written, THE KINGS OF THE EARTH BELIEVED NOT, NEITHER ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE WORLD, THAT THE ADVERSARY AND THE ENEMY WOULD ENTER INTO THE GATES OF JERUSALEM (Lam. 4:12).¹¹

Israel's enemies thus realized the protective function of the Temple, even though, according to this next midrash, they misunderstood its basis. Here the rabbis picture the wise men of Ahasuerus writing an unfriendly history of Israel:

After /David/ arose his son Solomon, who built for Israel a house which he called the Temple. I don't know what they had inside it. When they go to war, they go inside and perform magical incantations, and when they emerge from it, they kill and lay waste the world.¹²

When the Babylonians did defeat the Jews, the Temple was thus the prime target for capture:

The enemy came and set up their high place on the Temple mount. They went up to the central high place, the place where King Solomon had sat and taken advice from the elders. There, where the Temple had been completed, there the enemy sat and took

10. Menahot 53a-b (Soncino, p. 320).

11. Midrash Shir Ha-shirim 3:9.

12. Esther Rabbah 7:17.

counsel.¹³

For destroying the Temple, the perfection of Creation, Nebuchadnezzar was labeled by the rabbis as an archetypal villain. Just as Solomon was pre-ordained to be the chief of builders, Nebuchadnezzar was predestined to be the chief of the destroyers.¹⁴ Similarly, Solomon and Nebuchadnezzar represent good and evil, Jews and heathens, in the following midrash:

The Holy One, blessed be He, left idolators no opportunity to say in the future, "You kept us far from You." What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? Just as he raised up kings and wise men and prophets for Israel, so he raised them up for idolators. He raised up Solomon as king over Israel and all the earth, and He did likewise with Nebuchadnezzar /for the idolators/. This one built the Temple and uttered prayers and supplications; that one destroyed /the Temple/ and insulted and blasphemed and said, I WILL ASCEND ABOVE THE HEIGHTS OF THE CLOUDS; I WILL BE LIKE THE MOST HIGH (Is. 14:14).¹⁵

Solomon is similarly contrasted with another Temple-destroyer in the following midrash:

AND THE LORD SAID UNTO /Rebekah/: TWO NATIONS ARE IN THY WOMB (Gen. 25:23)....From one of them will come one who will build the Temple, which will be the pride of our power, as it is written, BEHOLD, I /the Lord/ WILL PROFANE MY SANCTUARY, THE PRIDE OF YOUR POWER (Ezek. 24:21). Who will that person be? Solomon. And from the other one will come one who will rise up to destroy it. Who will that be? Vespasian the wicked.¹⁶

The Second Temple apparently did not have the same impact on the

13. Pesikta Rabbati 26, p. 131a.

14. Esther Rabbah, Introduction 10.

15. Bemidbar Rabbah 20:1.

16. Midrash Ha-gadol, Toldot 23.

world as did Solomon's. The Shechinah did not even dwell in the later

Temple:

R. Isaac said: Why didn't the Shechinah dwell in the Second Temple which the people of the Exile built? Because it was built by Cyrus, the king of Persia, who is a descendant of Japheth, and the Shechinah does not dwell in the works of Japheth. But the first Temple was built by Israelites, descendants of Shem, and there the Shechinah dwelt, as it is said, GOD ENLARGE JAPHETH, BUT HE SHALL DWELL IN THE TENTS OF SHEM (Gen. 9:27).¹⁷

Cyrus' Temple was also structurally inferior to Solomon's:

WITH THREE ROWS OF GREAT STONES AND A ROW OF NEW TIMBER, AND LET THE EXPENSES BE GIVEN OUT OF THE KING'S HOUSE (Ezra 6:4). Why did he make these conditions? He thought to himself, If the Jews revolt against me, I will burn it with fire. But did not Solomon do the same thing, as it is written, THREE ROWS OF HEWN STONE AND A ROW OF CEDAR BEAMS (I Kings 6:36)? Solomon placed the wood above and he placed it below; Solomon sunk it in the building and he did not sink it in the building; Solomon plastered it over and he did not plaster it over.¹⁸

Neither was it quite as ornate:

THE TOP THEREOF /i.e., of Solomon's palanquin/ OF GOLD (Song 3:10). It was taught that the whole of the Temple was overlaid with gold except the backs of the doors. R. Aibu said that this Mishnah of ours refers to the Second Temple, but that in the First Temple the backs of the doors also were overlaid.¹⁹

The rabbis also compared Solomon's Temple to two other sanctuaries of Israel:

-
17. Pesikta Rabbati 35, p. 160a. See parallels in Bereshit Rabbah 36:8, and Yoma 9b-10a.
 18. Rosh Hashanah 4a (Soncino, p. 10).
 19. Bemidbar Rabbah 12:4 (Soncino, pp. 460-1).

Happy are those among the righteous the work of whose hands no enemy rules. This was so in the case of the Tabernacle which Moses built, over which no enemy ruled, and its table was never turned over on its face. But in the case of the Temple which Solomon built, enemies ruled over it, and its table was turned over on its face. But no enemy will ever rule over the Final Temple which the Holy One, blessed be He, will build, speedily and soon. And the Holy One, blessed be He, will dwell in it forever.²⁰

Pesikta Rabbati echoes this messianic note, reminding us that the loss of Solomon's Temple, and the state of cosmic perfection it momentarily created, will be made good in the end:

HIS LIPS ARE LILIES, DROPPING WITH MYRRH THAT PASSES AWAY (Song 5:13). One would think that the verse should say, "with myrrh that stays," since when Solomon built the Temple, the whole world was filled with the fragrance of spices. But /Solomon/ foresaw that the Temple would be destroyed. Solomon wept as he said, "This fragrance is for naught." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Do not grieve. I will rebuild it as a perfect structure." /This is the meaning of, MY BELOVED IS UNTO ME AS A BAG OF MYRRH/ THAT WILL LIE BETWEEN MY BREASTS (Song 1:13). Likewise it is said, HIS CHEEKS / לִפְתָּי / or "tablets" (לִפְתָּי)/ ARE AS A BED OF SPICES (Song 5:13).²¹

20. Seder Eliahu Rabbah 18, p. 95 (top).

21. Pesikta Rabbati 20, p. 96b. Compare Braude's translation, pp. 404-5. On the phrase from Song 1:13, see below, p. 18.

As was befitting so uniquely important a structure, the actual work of building the Temple was anything but ordinary:

What is the meaning of I HAVE SURELY BUILT /בִּנְיָנִי בָּנִיתִי/ (I Kings 8:13)? R. Jacob b. R. Judah bar Ezekiel said it means, "I have built an already-built building" /בִּנְיָנִי בָּנִיתִי/. R. Judah said in the name of R. Joseph: Everyone assists a king; so much the more does everyone assist the Holy One, blessed be He--even demons, even spirits, and even angels. R. Berechiah said: It is written, FOR THE HOUSE, WHEN IT WAS IN BUILDING, etc. (I Kings 6:7). "Which they were building" is not what's written here, but rather, "when it was in building"--it was built by itself. /It/ WAS BUILT OF STONE MADE READY AT THE QUARRY /שֶׁבֶט הַבֵּן/ means that the stone transported /שֶׁבֶט הַבֵּן/ itself and went up and placed itself on top of the row of stones. R. Abahu said: Don't be amazed. Isn't it written, AND A STONE WAS BROUGHT, AND LAID UPON THE MOUTH OF THE DEN (Daniel 6:18)? But are there stones in Babylonia?¹ Rather, it means that a stone arose from the land of Israel and came and rested itself upon the mouth of the den. R. Huna said in the name of R. Joseph: An angel descended at that moment and took the form of a lion of stone, and sat upon the mouth of the pit, as it is written, MY GOD HATH SENT HIS ANGEL, AND HATH SHUT THE LIONS' MOUTHS, AND THEY HAVE NOT HURT ME (*ibid.* 23). Now if for the sake of a mere mortal "a stone was brought," how much the more so for the glory of the King of the king of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.²

A magical creature called the Shamir played a particularly important role in the building, and Solomon went to considerable trouble to gain its services:

1. The notion that there were no stones in Babylonia may come from Gen. 11:3, AND THEY HAD BRICK FOR STONE, suggesting that they had no stone. See the note in the Mirkin edition of Bemidbar Rabbah, Part II (Vol. 10), p. 93.
2. Bemidbar Rabbah 14:3; Midrash Tehillim 24:10; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:5; Shemot Rabbah 52:4; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 6, section 182, pp. 374b-375a. In Pesikta Rabbati 6, pp. 25a-b, בִּנְיָנִי is explained this way: "I intended to build a building, but the stones flew up by themselves."

I GOT ME MEN-SINGERS AND WOMEN-SINGERS, AND THE DELIGHTS OF THE SONS OF MEN, SHIDAH AND SHIDOT (Eccl. 2:8)....The Master said: Here /in Babylonia/ they translate shidah and shidot as "male and female demons". For what did Solomon want them /since Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes/? It is written, AND THE HOUSE WHEN IT WAS IN BUILDING WAS MADE OF STONE MADE READY AT THE QUARRY, /THERE WAS NEITHER HAMMER NOR AXE NOR ANY TOOL OF IRON HEARD IN THE HOUSE WHILE IT WAS IN BUILDING/ (I Kings 6:7). Solomon said to the Rabbis, "How shall I manage /without iron tools/?" They replied, "There is the Shamir which Moses brought for the stones of the ephod." He asked them, "Where is it to be found?" They replied, "Bring a male and a female demon and tie them together; perhaps they know and will tell you." So he brought a male and female demon and tied them together. They said to him, "We do not know, but perhaps Ashmedai the prince of the demons knows." He said to them, "Where is he?" They answered, "He is in such-and-such a mountain. He has dug a pit there, which he fills with water and covers with a stone, which he then seals with his seal. Every day he goes up to heaven and studies in the Academy of the sky and then he comes down to earth and studies in the Academy of the earth, and then he goes and examines his seal and opens /the pit/ and drinks and then closes it and seals it again and goes away." Solomon thereupon sent thither Benaiahu son of Jehoiada, giving him a chain on which was graven the /Divine/ Name and a ring on which was graven the Name and fleeces of wool and bottles of wine. Benaiahu went and dug a pit lower down the hill and let the water flow into it and stopped /the hollow/ with the fleeces of wool, and he then dug a pit higher up and poured the wine into it and then filled up the pits. He then went and sat on a tree. When Ashmedai came he examined the seal, then opened the pit and found it full of wine. He said, "It is written, WINE IS A MOCKER, STRONG DRINK A BRAWLER, AND WHOSOEVER ERRETH THEREBY IS NOT WISE (Prov. 20:1). And it is also written, WHOREDOM AND WINE AND NEW WINE TAKE AWAY THE UNDERSTANDING (Hosea 4:11). I will not drink it." Growing thirsty, however, he could not resist, and he drank till he became drunk, and fell asleep. Benaiahu then came down and threw the chain over him and fastened it. When he awoke he began to struggle, whereupon /Benaiahu/ said, "The Name of thy Master is upon thee, the Name of Thy Master is upon thee." /Benaiahu took Ashedai back to Solomon./ After three days /Ashmedai/ went in to see /Solomon/. He took a reed and

and measured four cubits and threw it in front of /Solomon/, saying, "See now, when you die you will have no more than four cubits in this world. Now, however, you have subdued the whole world, yet you are not satisfied till you subdue me too." He replied, "I want nothing of you. What I want is to build the Temple and I require the Shamir." He said, "It is not in my hands, it is in the hands of the Prince of the Sea who gives it only to the woodpecker, to whom he trusts it on oath. What does the bird do with it? He takes it to a mountain where there is no cultivation and puts it on the edge of the rock which thereupon splits, and he then takes seeds from trees and brings them and throws them into the opening and things grow there"So they found out a woodpecker's nest with young in it, and covered it over with white glass. When the bird came it wanted to get in but could not, so it went and brought the Shamir and placed it on the glass. Benaiah thereupon gave a shout, and it dropped /the Shamir/ and he took it, and the bird went and committed suicide on account of its oath....Solomon kept /Ashmedai/ with him until he had built the Temple.³

Another midrash gives us a description of the Shamir and its power, as well as an alternate version of how Solomon got it. Here R. Judah in the name of Rabbi is describing instances in which the soft overcame the hard:

Also the Shamir, which was like a kind of barley-corn. It was kept in a leaden vessel filled with cotton, but if one placed it even on top of a mountain, or on rocks, it would descend, cutting its way to the bottom. With it Solomon cut all the stones for the Temple, as it is written in the Torah, THOU SHALT LIFT UP NO IRON TOOL UPON THEM /the stones of the altar/ (Deut. 27:5). Who brought it to him? The eagle brought it from the Garden of Eden, as it is said, /Solomon/ SPOKE OF /here, "commanded"/ BEASTS AND FOWL (I Kings 5:13). Solomon said to them, "How can the Shamir be captured?" So the eagle went and brought it. Some say it was not the eagle, but

3. Gittin 68a-b (Soncino, pp. 322-5); Midrash Tehillim 78:12; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 6, section 182, p. 375a; Yalkut Ha-makiri, Eccl. 20. For the full text of this passage, see pp. 97-101.

rather the hoopoe /woodpecker/.⁴

R. Nehemiah argued with the general opinion that the stones for the Temple were miraculously hewn. But his opinion was rejected:

Our Rabbis taught: With the Shamir Solomon built the Temple, as it is said, AND THE HOUSE, WHEN IT WAS IN BUILDING, WAS BUILT OF STONE MADE READY AT THE QUARRY (I Kings 6:7). The words are to be understood as they are written; such is the statement of R. Judah. R. Nehemiah asked him, "Is it possible to say so? Has it not been stated, ALL THESE WERE OF COSTLY STONES.. ..SAWED WITH SAWS (ibid. 7:9)!" "If that be so, why is there a text to state, THERE WAS NEITHER HAMMER, NOR AXE NOR ANY TOOL OF IRON HEARD IN THE HOUSE, WHILE IT WAS IN THE BUILDING (ibid. 6:7)?" "It means that they prepared them outside and brought them within." Rabbi said: The statement of R. Judah is probable in connection with the stones of the Sanctuary, and the statement of R. Nehemiah in connection with /Solomon's/ house. For what purpose, then, according to R. Nehemiah, was the Shamir necessary? /In order to cut the stones of the ephod and the High Priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:11, 20)./⁵

And the Zohar makes explicit the role of the Shamir:

AND THERE WAS NEITHER HAMMER NOR AXE NOR ANY TOOL OF IRON HEARD IN THE HOUSE IN ITS BEING BUILT (I Kings 6:7). This is because the Shamir (a stone-cutting insect) performed all the splitting without any sound being heard. No cutting-tools were thus required, the whole work being accomplished by a miracle.⁶

Created at the world's beginning for its specific tasks, the Shamir ceased to exist when Solomon's Temple was destroyed.⁷

Solomon was assisted by human workers as well, of course. But their work was also miraculous:

4. Midrash Tehillim 78:11.

5. Sotah 48b (Soncino, pp. 260-1); T. Sotah 15:1.

6. Zohar, Bereshit 74a (Soncino I, pp. 251-2).

7. M. Sotah 9:12; Y. Sotah 23b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 6, section 182, p. 375a.

R. Simeon began his discourse with the verse, AND THE HOUSE IN ITS BEING BUILT, WAS BUILT OF STONE MADE READY AT THE QUARRY; AND THERE WAS NEITHER HAMMER NOR AXE NOR ANY TOOL OF IRON HEARD IN THE HOUSE IN ITS BEING BUILT (I Kings 6:7). He said: The phrase IN ITS BEING BUILT implies self-building, as though without the hands of artisans. Were not, then, Solomon with all his workpeople engaged in the work of building? It was here as with the candlestick, in regard to which we read, AND THOU SHALT MAKE...OF BEATEN WORK WILL THE CANDLESTICK BE MADE (Ex. 25:31). If the candlestick was to be made of itself, why say THOU SHALT MAKE IT? In reality it was made of itself, by a miracle. So soon as the artisans set their hands to the work, it showed them how to proceed in a manner quite novel to them, the reason being that the blessing of the Almighty rested on their hands; and similarly here, in the building of the Sanctuary. It was built of its own accord, though seemingly by the hands of the labourers; it showed the workers a design which guided their hands and from which they did not turn their eyes until the whole building of the house was completed. Further it says, OF STONE MADE READY AT THE QUARRY (I Kings 6:7). The word *שֶׁלֵּמָה*/"made ready"/ is written defectively, as though *שֶׁלֵּמָה*/Solomon/, for truly it was of Solomon; while *עָלָה*/lit. "transporting"/ implies that the hands of the workers were moved involuntarily, so that they did they knew not what.⁸

Furthermore, they and their tools were miraculously preserved during their work:

THUS ALL THE WORK WAS FINISHED /וְנִשְׁלַט/ (I Kings 7:51). This actually means, "There was peace" /וְנִשְׁלַט/. Not one of all the craftsmen who were doing the building died or even fell ill. Their saws and axes didn't break. They didn't grow weary. Their clothes didn't wear out; none of their tools needed repair or replacement. So we should read, "So all the work was peaceful." And if you find this hard to believe, remember R. Eleazar said: In honor of a mere mortal this happened. Of all the Egyptians who went up with

8. Zohar, loc. cit.

Jacob to his burial along with Joseph, as it says, AND JOSEPH WENT UP, etc. (Gen. 50:7), nothing of theirs wore out. Yet you find it hard to believe that this could happen in regard to the structure belonging to the Holy One, blessed be He!⁹

As with the Shamir, the ultimate fate of the craftsmen was tied to the Temple:

THUS ALL THE WORK WAS FINISHED /וְנִשְׁלַם/ (I Kings 7:51). When the craftsmen finished the work, their lives were finished /וְנִשְׁלַם/. Just a moment ago you said that not one of them fell sick or grew weary, and now you say that as soon as they had finished their work, they died!? /The explanation is that/ the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Let not the nations of the world take them and build buildings with them. For they will say, 'These are they who, along with Solomon, built the building of God.'" /In that context,/ what does וְנִשְׁלַם mean? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "It is my responsibility to pay /וְנִשְׁלַם/ them their just reward."¹⁰

The chief craftsman of the Temple was Hiram of Tyre. He was divinely inspired with "wisdom and understanding and skill" (I Kings 7:14), the same three ingredients used by God in the Creation, by Bezalel in making the Tabernacle, and by God again in the Temple of messianic times.¹¹ Hiram also conformed with another pattern set in the building of the Tabernacle:

/Hiram/ WAS THE SON OF A WIDOW /OF THE TRIBE OF NAPHTALI/ (I Kings 7:14). But elsewhere it is written, /Hiram was/ THE SON OF A WOMAN OF THE DAUGHTERS OF DAN (II Chron. 2:13). R. Levi said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Hanina: You find that

9. Pesikta Rabbati 6, p. 25a; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 7, section 186, p. 376a.

10. Ibid.; ibid.

11. Shemot Rabbah 48:4.

when the Tabernacle was made, two tribes cooperated in the work--the tribe of Judah, represented by Bezalel, and the tribe of Dan, represented by Oholiab the son of Ahisamach. So it was also in the work of the Temple: /Hiram/, the son of a widow of the daughters of Dan, and Solomon, the son of David, of the tribe of Judah.¹²

Unlike the other craftsmen, Hiram did not die when his work on the Temple was completed. Rather, he entered Paradise alive, something only nine people are said to have done.¹³

Even with all the miraculous assistance afforded him, Solomon asked the Pharaoh for some extra helpers. Solomon discovered that the Pharaoh would be no great help:

/AND SOLOMON'S WISDOM EXCELLED.../ ALL THE WISDOM OF EGYPT (I Kings 5:10). What was the wisdom of Egypt? You find that when Solomon wanted to build the Temple, he sent to Pharaoh Necho saying, "Send me craftsmen whom I will pay; I want to build the Temple." What did Pharaoh do? He gathered together all his astrologers and told them, "Figure out which craftsmen are destined to die within the year, and I will send them to Solomon, so that I may come upon him with a grievance. I will say to him, 'Give me reparations for the craftsmen whom you have killed.'" When they arrived, Solomon recognized, through divine inspiration, that they would die within the

-
12. Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 7, section 185, p. 375b; Pesikta Rabbati 6 (end), p. 26a. In the Yalkut, R. Yohanan uses Hiram to teach a homely lesson: R. Yohanan said: Whence do we know that a man should not take up a craft different from that of his father? From the text, AND KING SOLOMON SENT AND FETCHED HIRAM OUT OF TYRE....HIS FATHER WAS...A WORKER IN BRASS; AND HE /Hiram/ WAS FILLED WITH WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING AND SKILL, TO WORK ALL WORKS IN BRASS (I Kings 7:13-14). Pesikta Rabbati contains a similar passage.
 13. Derech Eretz Zuta, Chapter 1 (end), pp. 54-5. The midrash actually lists Hiram, king of Tyre. But the editors explain in a note that this cannot be intended, since Hiram the king is viewed as utterly evil in Baba Batra 75b, and also in Ezek. 28. This reference then must be to Hiram the craftsman.

year. So he gave them their shrouds and sent them back to Pharaoh. And he sent the message, "Don't you have enough shrouds to bury your dead? Here then are their shrouds. Now go bury your dead."¹⁴

14. Tanhuma, Hukat 6; Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3; Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3; Kohelet Rabbah 7:41.

III

In addition to the miracles wrought by the Temple builders, other miracles occurred spontaneously among the artifacts within the Temple. For instance, the staves of the Ark miraculously extended themselves:

The two staves of the Ark extended from the Ark until they reached the curtain /of the Holy of Holies/, as it is said, AND THE STAVES WERE SO LONG /or "extended"/ (I Kings 8:8). Perhaps /from outside/ they couldn't be seen inside? But it says, THE ENDS OF THE STAVES WERE SEEN (*ibid.*). Perhaps they tore through the curtain? But it says, BUT THEY COULD NOT BE SEEN WITHOUT (*ibid.*). From this, one must say that the staves stretched and reached the curtain and pushed the curtain out, and so were seen to be inside. In the tradition, the following verse is explained with reference to them: MY BELOVED IS UNTO ME AS A BAG OF MYRRH, THAT LIETH BETWIXT MY BREASTS (Song 1:13).¹

Rabbanai said in the name of Samuel that Solomon's Cherubim stood in the Holy of Holies by virtue of a miracle, since their wings alone filled the room, leaving no space for their bodies, or for that matter, for the Ark next to which they stood (I Kings 8:7).²

The trees with which Solomon decorated the Temple area were

-
1. T. Yom Ha-kippurim 2 (3):7. The parallel in Yoma 54a credits this to R. Judah, and makes explicit the resemblance of the staves to a woman's breasts. See above, p. 9. But Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, section 187, p. 376a, says that the Ark was placed with its length across the width of the Holy of Holies, resulting in the protrusion.
 2. Yoma 21a. See note 8 in the Soncino, p. 92.

miraculous as well:

R. Hoshaia said: When Solomon built the Temple, he planted in it all kinds of choice fruits, of gold. They would blossom with fruit in their season, and when the wind blew through them, the fruit would fall, as it is said, MAY HIS FRUIT RUSTLE LIKE LEBANON (Ps. 72:16).³ The fruit was a means of support for the priesthood. But when idolators entered the Temple, the trees dried up, as it is said, AND THE FLOWER OF LEBANON LANGUISHETH (Nahum 1:4). But the Holy One, blessed be He, will restore them to us, as it is said, IT SHALL BLOSSOM ABUNDANTLY AND REJOICE, EVEN WITH JOY AND SINGING; THE GLORY OF LEBANON SHALL BE GIVEN UNTO IT (Is. 35:2).⁴

In another version of this midrash, all trees are included, and the reason for the trees' drying up is different, as are the attribution and the use of the prooftexts:

R. Aha said in the name of R. Isaac: When Solomon built the Temple, he planted golden specimens of every tree of the field within the walls of the Temple. When the tree outside the Temple blossomed, the corresponding tree inside the Temple would also blossom, as it is written, IT SHALL BLOSSOM ABUNDANTLY, etc., EVEN WITH JOY AND SINGING; THE GLORY OF LEBANON, etc. (Is. 35:2). It is possible that the text, MAY HIS FRUIT RUSTLE LIKE LEBANON (Ps. 72:16), refers to this. When did they dry up? When Manasseh set up an idol in the Temple /II Kings 21:7/, as it is said, AND THE FLOWER OF LEBANON LANGUISHETH (Nahum 1:4). But the Holy One, blessed be He, will restore them in the future, as it is written, IT SHALL BLOSSOM ABUNDANTLY, etc., from the trees of Lebanon, namely, the trees which Hiram brought.⁵

The trees were not the only things in the Temple which bloomed.

-
3. R. Hoshaia makes Solomon the referent of "his", since this psalm is attributed to Solomon, and is a prayer for the well-being of the king.
 4. Yoma 39b; 21b.
 5. Midrash Shir Ha-shirim 3:9. Y. Yoma 41d, attributes to R. Isaac Hinenah in the name of R. Isaac the part about Manasseh.

The wooden beams of the Temple itself also blossomed:

The cedars which Hiram, king of Tyre, sent to Solomon for the building of the Temple blossomed and put forth a pleasing odor throughout the world. R. Levi said: When Solomon brought the Ark into the Temple, all the trees and the cedars there blossomed and put forth fruit, as it is said, PLANTED IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, THEY SHALL FLOURISH IN THE COURTS OF OUR GOD (Ps. 92:14). They continued to bear fruit, providing much sustenance to the youth /"flowers"/ of the priesthood, until Manasseh brought an idol into the Holy of Holies. Then the Shechinah departed, and the fruit dried up, as it is said, AND THE FLOWER OF LEBANON LANGUISHETH (Nahum 1:4).⁶

And the golden figures (whatever they were) blossomed as well:

/KING SOLOMON MADE HIMSELF A/ PALANQUIN (Song 3:9). This refers to the Temple. Why is it called a "palanquin" / פלנקין /? Because all the golden figures therein /produced fruit(פירות)/ of their own kind.⁷

One other midrash expands this theme to its fullest:

BEHOLD, IT IS THE LITTER /OF SOLOMON/ (Song 3:7)-- this refers to the Temple. Why is the Temple compared to a bed? Just as a bed is for procreation /"being fruitful and multiplying"/, so too with the Temple--everything in it was fruitful and multiplied, as it is said, AND THE STAVES EXTENDED /themselves/ (I Kings 8:8). Likewise it says, AND THE GOLD WAS GOLD OF PARVAIM (II Chron. 3:6), meaning it bore fruit /reading פירות as פירות/. Likewise it says, FOR HE BUILT THE HOUSE OF THE FOREST OF LEBANON. Why is the Temple compared to a forest? To teach that just as a forest is fruitful and multiplies, so too with the Temple--everything in it was fruitful and multiplied.⁸

6. Tanhuma, Terumah 11.

7. Bemidbar Rabbah 12:4. This translation is suggested by an editor's note in the Mirkin edition. But it can also be read, "Because all the figures of gold therein grew of their own accord" (Soncino, p. 460).

8. Tanhuma, Naso 9.

IV

The rabbis showed interest in the vessels of the Temple as well as in the building itself. In one case, the rabbis used the molten sea (I Kings 7:23) to teach some mathematical lessons.¹ In another, they used the description of the oxen supporting the sea (*ibid.* 25) to derive the lesson that the priest always turned right while ministering at the altar.² "Tractate Vessels", a pseudo-Mishnaic midrash, describes the various precious metals and jewels used in the vessels, and also their various fates when the Temples were destroyed.³ Two sections of the tractate refer specifically to Solomon, telling us where he got the metals and jewels, and describing their enormous value:

Mishnah 5. /There were/ 77 tables of gold,⁴ and their gold revealed itself to Solomon from the walls of the Garden of Eden. It shone as the radiance of the sun and the moon in the heavens. All the gold and silver in the world from the six days of Creation to the reign of Zedekiah was not equal to the value of the gold which covered the Temple inside and out. The quantity of gold covering the Temple and its front was unfathomable, beyond measure, unlimited, too enormous to be weighed. An additional seven thousand talents of gold were hidden in the treasury. And there were precious stones and one layer of sandalwood /I Kings 6:36/. In the three layers made of precious stones, the length of each stone was seven cubits, and its width five cubits. David prepared them. The length of each jewel was ten cubits. David

1. Eruvin 14a-b.

2. Zevachim 62b.

3. Rav Pe'alim, pp. 16ff; Beit Ha-midrash II, pp. 88-91.

4. This is apparently legendary, since Solomon actually made only ten tables at the most (II Chron. 4:8). According to I Kings 7:48, he made only one.

set all these aside for the Temple of his son Solomon.⁵

The gold came from the Garden of Eden, the jewels from David.

In Mishnah 7, these two sources are combined:

The precious stones, the jewels, the silver and the gold which King David set apart for the Temple amounted to a million talents of silver and a hundred thousand talents of gold; there were six hundred trees of gold which blossomed fruit,⁶ and 660,000 talents of pure gold which had been under the tree of life in the Garden of Holiness. All these were revealed to Hilkiah the Scribe, who entrusted them to the angel Shamshi'el. He kept them until King David came along, and he entrusted to him the silver and the gold. Along with these was the gold which Solomon contributed; and there were other talents of gold and precious stones which were beyond all valuation. All these were hidden and guarded from the army of the Chaldeans /Babylonians/ in the place called Bursif.

Even the brass of the Temple was unusually precious:

/Solomon/ MADE THE PILLARS THEREOF /i.e., of his palanquin/ OF SILVER (Song 3:10) agrees with AND HE SET UP THE PILLARS BEFORE THE TEMPLE, ONE ON THE RIGHT HAND, etc. (II Chron. 3:17). But were they of silver? Were they not of brass? Yes, but it was burnished brass equivalent to silver.⁷

The rabbis also saw the vessels of the Temple as symbols. This notion, developed in detail for all the vessels, is found in Midrash Tadshe. The following excerpt will illustrate:

AND /Hiram/ SET UP THE PILLARS AT THE PORCH OF THE TEMPLE; AND HE SET UP THE RIGHT PILLAR, AND CALLED THE NAME THEREOF JACHIN; AND HE SET UP THE LEFT PILLAR, AND CALLED THE NAME THEREOF BOAZ (I Kings 7:21). "Jachin" / יָכִין / symbolizes THE

5. The subject of David's contribution to the Temple is discussed in Chapter 9, pp. 231ff.

6. See above, p. 19.

7. Bemidbar Rabbah 12:4 (Soncino, p. 460).

MOON, ESTABLISHED / יָדָה / FOREVER (Ps. 89:38). And the moon establishes for Israel the holidays and the years, as it is said, /The Lord/ APPOINTED THE MOON FOR SEASONS (Ps. 104:19). "Boaz" / בֹּאֵז / symbolizes the sun, which rises in glory and strength / יָדָה /, as it is said, /The sun/ REJOICETH AS A STRONG MAN TO RUN HIS COURSE (Ps. 19:6). They symbolize also the two eyes of the body: Just as the eyes are high and set in the head, so were these two pillars tall and thick.⁸

Some vessels served magical symbolic purposes:

AND /Hiram/ MADE TEN LAVERS (II Chron. 4:6)--in order to increase the rains,⁹ which are in basins of water....Now why did /Moses/ in the desert make only one laver? Because Israel didn't need rain in the desert, since they had the manna which fell and the well which went with them /and so didn't need rain for agriculture¹⁰/. Solomon made the lavers in order to increase the rains, because Israel was in the land of settlement, and needed lots of rain, as it is written, /THE LAND, WHITHER YE GO OVER TO POSSESS IT, IS /A LAND OF HILLS AND VALLEYS, /AND DRINKETH WATER AS THE RAIN OF HEAVEN COMETH DOWN/ (Deut. 11:11).¹¹

AND /Hiram/ MADE TEN TABLES (II Chron. 4:8)--in order to increase seeds. Now why did Moses make just one? Because they didn't need seeds in the desert. But when Solomon came along, he made ten of them, in order to increase seeds.¹²

Even the placement of the tables had magical significance:

/Solomon/ placed five tables on the right, which is south, symbolizing the right side of the world, whence dews of blessing come into the world. Solomon said, "By virtue of these tables placed on the right, may rains of blessing and dews of blessing come into the world from the right." Likewise he placed five tables on the left, toward the north, which is left,

8. Midrash Tadshe 2, p. 2.

9. Note that this contradicts what we read above, p. 5.

10. See the editor's note, p. 4.

11. Midrash Tadshe 2, p. 4.

12. Ibid.

whence evils come into the world. Solomon said, "By virtue of these tables placed on the left, may evils be kept away from Israel." Likewise he set up the ten lavers, five on the right and five on the left.¹³

And, like the Temple itself, its vessels protected Israel from enemies:

AND /Hiram/ MADE THE TEN CANDLESTICKS OF GOLD (II Chron. 4:7)...Now each candlestick held seven candles, totaling seventy, symbolizing the seventy nations.¹⁴ All the time that the candles burned, the nations were subdued, but from the day the candles went out, they conquered.¹⁵

The connection between candles and military power is also evident in the following midrash:

Why did Moses make seven candles /i.e., one menorah/ while Solomon made seventy /ten menorot/? Moses uprooted seven nations from before Israel, but Solomon ruled over the seventy nations, as it is said, AND SOLOMON RULED OVER ALL THE KINGDOMS (I Kings 5:1).¹⁶

Here, as on the previous page, the rabbis compared the vessels of Solomon with those of Moses, in an apparent effort to explain discrepancies between the numbers in each case. But they were also concerned with the relative importance of the two sets of vessels. Which set should receive greater respect? The following midrash provides a clue:

טוהב טיהה /pure gold/ is such as can be put into the fire without losing any weight. R. Judah

-
13. Ibid. For further discussion of the placement of the tables and the candlesticks, see Menahot 98b; Y. Shekalim 50a.
14. In rabbinic thought, there were seventy nations in the world.
15. Midrash Tadshe 2, p. 5.
16. Yalkut Shim'oni, Beha'alotcha 8, section 719, p. 235a.

in the name of R. Ammi said: Solomon passed a thousand talents through the furnace a thousand times and all that remained of them was only one talent. But was it not taught that R. Jose b. R. Judah said: It is reported of the candlestick of the Temple that it exceeded in weight that of the wilderness by only a Gordian dinar and they had to put it into the furnace eighty times before the weight was reduced? At first, the gold lost a great deal but afterwards it only lost a little.¹⁷

This indicates that the vessels of the Tabernacle served as a model for those of the Temple, a model which had to be scrupulously copied. Indeed, the vessels of the Tabernacle were considered superior in religious significance to those of the Temple, according to this midrash:

WISDOM IS BETTER (Eccl. 9:18)--this refers to Moses;
 THAN WEAPONS OF WAR / נִשְׁכֵּי קָרֶבֶת / (ibid.)--this
 refers to Solomon. Even though Solomon made ten
 candlesticks and ten tables, /the priests/ only
 offered sacrifices / מִקְרִבֵּיט / with the vessels
 / טַבָּחִים / which Moses made.¹⁸

But R. Jose and R. Judah disagreed, at least with regard to the tables:

Even though /Solomon made ten tables/, he only
 arranged /the showbread/ on the table of Moses,
 as it is said, AND THE TABLE WHEREUPON THE SHOW-
 BREAD WAS (I Kings 7:48) /i.e., one table, not
 ten/. R. Jose said in the name of R. Judah: He
 arranged /the showbread/ on all the tables, as
 it is said, AND THE TABLES WHEREON WAS THE SHOW-
 BREAD (II Chron. 4:19).¹⁹

In another version of this midrash, R. Jose and R. Judah reconcile the two passages in quite a different way. Here the candlesticks are

17. Bemidar Rabbah 12:4 (Soncino, p. 461).

18. Yalkut Shim'oni, Eccl. 9, section 989, p. 546b.

19. Y. Shekalim 50a.

also included:

Our masters taught: Solomon made ten tables, but only the table of Moses was used for arranging the showbread, as it is said, AND THE TABLE WHEREUPON THE SHOWBREAD WAS, OF GOLD (I Kings 7:48). Solomon made ten candlesticks, but only that of Moses was kindled, as it is said, THE CANDLESTICK OF GOLD WITH THE LAMPS THEREOF, TO BURN EVERY EVENING (II Chron. 13:11). R. Eleazar b. Shamo'a said: The showbread was arranged on all the tables, as it is said, AND THE TABLES WHEREON WAS THE SHOWBREAD (II Chron. 4:19); and all the candlesticks were kindled, as it is said, THE CANDLESTICKS WITH THEIR LAMPS, THAT THEY SHOULD BURN ACCORDING TO THE ORDINANCE BEFORE THE SANCTUARY, OF PURE GOLD (*ibid.* 20). R. Jose said in the name of R. Judah: The showbread was arranged only on the table of Moses. So how can I reconcile the passage, AND THE TABLES WHEREON WAS THE SHOWBREAD (II Chron. 4:19)? There were three tables in the Temple, two of which were inside the porch at the entrance of the Sanctuary. One was made of silver, one of gold. On the table of silver they laid the showbread when it was brought in, and on the table of gold they laid the showbread when it was brought out, since what is holy we must raise /in honor/ but not bring down. And within /the Sanctuary/ was a table of gold whereon the showbread lay continually.²⁰

Midrash Tadshe resolves the problem in another way. At first, only the table and candlestick of Moses were used; later on, the vessels of Solomon were used as well.²¹

In one instance, however, a vessel of Solomon replaced a vessel from the Tabernacle. Explaining the phrase, AN ALTAR OF EARTH THOU SHALT MAKE UNTO ME (Ex. 20:21), Isi b. Akiba said:

"An altar of brass filled with earth you shall make Me," as it is said, BECAUSE THE BRAZEN ALTAR THAT WAS BEFORE THE LORD WAS TOO LITTLE TO RECEIVE THE BURNT-OFFERING (I Kings 8:64). But was it really too little? Wasn't it already said, A THOUSAND BURNT-OFFERINGS DID SOLOMON OFFER UPON THAT ALTAR (I Kings 3:4)? So why does the text say "too small"? It

20. Menahot 99a (Soncino, p. 605).

21. Midrash Tadshe 2, p. 5.

means that on the day that /Solomon's altar/
was built, this one /from the Tabernacle/ was
put away.²²

One other midrash combined the symbolic interpretation of the vessels with a comparative approach, using one of Solomon's vessels to explain the symbolism of a gift-offering used in the Tabernacle. The passage has just explained that the silver dish of Nahshon is symbolic of the ocean, which encircles the world and resembles a dish:

Why was the dish ONE HUNDRED THIRTY SHEKELS IN WEIGHT (Nu. 7:13)? When, on the third day of Creation, the Holy One, blessed be He, gathered together all the waters into one place, he called them "seas" / יַמִּים /, as it said, AND THE GATHERING TOGETHER OF THE WATERS HE CALLED SEAS (Gen. 1:10). Now יַמִּים in gematria equals 100--"yod" and "yod" equals 20, and "mem" and "mem" equals 80, totaling 100. Along came Solomon and added to the craftwork of the Tabernacle another sea, in which the priests could bathe, as it is said, AND HE MADE THE MOLTEN SEA OF TEN CUBITS FROM BRIM TO BRIM...AND A LINE OF THIRTY CUBITS DID COMPASS IT ROUND ABOUT (I Kings 7:23). To symbolize those thirty cubits, the circumference of Solomon's sea, /Nahshon/ added thirty shekels to the weight of the dish, to symbolize Solomon's sea. So the total was one hundred thirty shekels, symbolizing the seas and Solomon's sea.²³

22. Mechilta, Bahodesh 11 (beginning). In a cryptic passage in Zevachim 60a, R. Judah and R. Jose dispute the meaning of I Kings 8:64. Both understand it to mean that Solomon replaced the brazen altar with one of stone. R. Judah says Solomon's altar was also too small, while R. Jose says the brazen altar was actually unfit, and euphemistically called small. (See Soncino, p. 298.) But neither identifies the brazen altar as the altar of the Tabernacle. However, we might infer that connection from what comes below on page 61b. See below, p. 35.

23. Bemidbar Rabbah 13:14.

Even with all the miraculous assistance he received, Solomon encountered one snag before bringing his project to its conclusion. This snag developed when Solomon attempted to bring the Ark into the Temple:

When Solomon built the Temple, he sought to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, but the gates clung together. He uttered twenty-four prayers, but he was not answered. Then he said, LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, AND BE YE LIFTED UP, YE EVERLASTING DOORS; THAT THE KING OF GLORY MAY COME IN. WHO IS THE KING OF GLORY? THE LORD STRONG AND MIGHTY, THE LORD MIGHTY IN BATTLE (Ps. 24:7-8). And it is said, LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, YEA, LIFT THEM UP, YE EVERLASTING DOORS; THAT THE KING OF GLORY, etc. (*ibid.* 9f). But he was not answered. But when he said, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED; REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (II Chron 6:42), he was answered immediately.¹

In other versions, Solomon is stymied as he attempts to summon the heavenly fire to descend and consume his dedicatory offering:

It is written, WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD THAT ARE ALREADY DEAD (Eccl. 4:2). About whom did Solomon compose this verse?...R. Joshua said: He said it about none other than David his father. How do we know? You find that when Solomon built the Temple, he prayed before God that the fire might descend, and he was not answered. But when he mentioned the dead, namely, David his father, he was answered immediately, as it is said, REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (II Chron. 6:42), and immediately afterwards, NOW WHEN SOLOMON HAD MADE AN END OF PRAYING, THE FIRE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN (*ibid.* 7:1). When Solomon saw that he prayed and was not answered, but that when

1. Sanhedrin 107b; Mo'ed Katan 9a; Shabbat 30a; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, section 193, p. 376b. Obviously, David's merit plays a major role here, and below. That issue is discussed in Chapter 9, pp. 233ff.

he mentioned David his father, the fire descended immediately, he began saying, WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD THAT ARE ALREADY DEAD MORE THAN THE LIVING THAT ARE YET ALIVE. This last he said referring to himself.²

And another version links these two together:

R. Samuel b. Nahman began his interpretation /of Eccl. 4:2/ by applying it to David. When Solomon built the Temple, he requested that fire descend from the heavens, but it didn't descend. He offered a thousand burnt-offerings, but it didn't descend. He prayed twenty-four prayers, but it didn't descend. Then he said, REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (II Chron. 6:42); the fire descended immediately, as it is said, NOW WHEN SOLOMON HAD MADE AN END OF PRAYING, THE FIRE CAME DOWN (*ibid.* 7:1). R. Yudah in the name of R. La'yi said that David came to life at that moment. Our masters said that Solomon brought David's ark. The two views are not incompatible. Those who say that David came to life at that moment refer to David's saying, O LORD, THOU BROUGHTEST UP MY SOUL FROM THE NETHER-WORLD, etc. (Ps. 30:4). And another verse says, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED (II Chron. 6:42), who lives before You. And for those who say that Solomon brought David's ark, it is written, REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (*ibid.*). Of this moment, it is said, WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD/...MORE THAN THE LIVING/ (Eccl. 4:2), /this last referring,/ for example, to me /Solomon/ and my contemporaries.³

In yet another version, the opinion of the masters is adopted, making clear the connection between the fire and the Ark:

Without /David/, the heavenly fire would not have descended. As it is said, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED; REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (II Chron. 6:42). R. Helbo said in the name of R. Shilo: Solomon went and brought the Ark of David his father. and said before

-
2. Shemot Rabbah 42:2; Midrash Tehillim 7:6. The latter attributes this to R. Samuel b. Nahman.
 3. Kohelet Rabbah 4:2.

God, "Lord of the worlds, if I am devoid of good deeds, do it for the sake of the good deeds of David." Immediately the fire came down.⁴

Here then the snag develops in the summoning of the fire, and the Ark is brought up to solve that problem. In most versions, however, the problem develops when Solomon brings up the Ark, and the fire descends when that problem has been solved. The following example of this view is particularly significant, because it gives a reason for all of Solomon's difficulties:

It is written, LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, AND BE YE LIFTED UP, etc. (Ps. 24:7). You find that when Solomon built the Temple, he sought to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, but at the same time, the gates clung together. Solomon uttered twenty-four prayers, from the verse, BUT WILL GOD IN VERY TRUTH DWELL, etc. (II Chron. 6:18), to the verse, NOW THEREFORE ARISE, O LORD GOD, INTO THY RESTING-PLACE, THOU, AND THE ARK OF THY STRENGTH, etc. (*ibid.* 41), twenty-four verses.⁵ But he was not answered. He tried again, saying, LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, AND BE YE LIFTED UP, etc. But he was not answered. He tried again, saying, LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, YEA, LIFT THEM UP, YE EVER-LASTING DOORS, etc. (Ps. 24:9). But he was not answered. But when he said, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED; REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (II Chron. 6:42), he was immediately answered: the gates lifted up their heads and the Ark entered and the Shechinah rested in the Temple and the fire came down from the heavens; as it is written just afterwards, NOW WHEN SOLOMON HAD MADE AN END OF PRAYING, THE FIRE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND CONSUMED THE BURNT-OFFERING AND THE SACRIFICES; AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD FILLED THE HOUSE (*ibid.* 7:1). Now why was Solomon

4. Yalkut Shim'oni, II Samuel 7, section 144, p. 367a.

5. Rashi derives the twenty-four prayers (רַנְנוּן) from the twenty-four occurrences of the words רָנָה, רָנְנוּ, and בָּרַכְנוּ, or forms of them, in these same twenty-four verses; Mo'ed Katan 9a.

put to all this trouble? Because he boasted, saying, I HAVE SURELY BUILT THEE A HOUSE OF HABITATION, etc. (I Kings 8:13).⁶

But another version says that Solomon's difficulties resulted not from arrogance but from a simple miscalculation on his part:

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, AND BE YE LIFTED, etc. (Ps. 24:7). Solomon spoke this verse when he tried to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies. He made an ark of ten cubits, and put the Ark /of Moses/ into that, and carried it up. When he arrived at the opening of the Temple, /he discovered that/ the opening was also ten cubits. Now ten cubits can't pass through ten cubits. Besides, there was no room for those carrying the Ark; when they tried to bring it in, they couldn't. Solomon was stymied and embarrassed and didn't know what to do. He began to pray before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED (II Chron. 6:42). What did Solomon do? Our masters, may their memory be a blessing, said: He went and brought the Ark of David his father, and prayed, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED. R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Helbo: At that moment, David came to life. You must conclude this, because David said, O LORD, THOU BROUGHTEST UP MY SOUL FROM THE NETHER-WORLD; THOU DIDST KEEP ME ALIVE, THAT I SHOULD NOT GO DOWN TO THE PIT (Ps. 30:4). The Solomon said, "Lord of the universe, do it because of the merit of this one"--REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (II Chron. 6:42). Immediately he was answered, as it is said, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED, etc. (*ibid.*). What's written immediately afterwards? NOW WHEN SOLOMON HAD MADE AN END OF PRAYING, THE FIRE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, etc. (*ibid.* 7:1). Then the Holy Spirit cried out, saying, WHEREFORE I

6. Bemidbar Rabbah 14:3; Midrash Tehillim 24:10. See Y. Ta'anit 65d, where the benediction ending, "Blessed is He Who humbles the arrogant," is applied to Solomon for his having said, I HAVE SURELY BUILT THEE A HOUSE OF HABITATION.

PRAISED THE DEAD THAT ARE ALREADY DEAD, etc.
(Eccl. 4:2).⁷

Yet, although they don't cling together in this version, the gates are still hostile to Solomon, again because of his supposed arrogance:

Solomon had originally begun his prayer by saying, LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, AND BE YE LIFTED UP, YE EVERLASTING DOORS, THAT THE KING OF GLORY MAY COME IN (Ps. 24:7). At that moment the gates sought to fall and crush his head, since they thought that he had said "the King of glory" about himself. They said to him, WHO THEN IS THE KING OF GLORY? (*ibid.* 10). He replied, THE LORD OF HOSTS, HE IS THE KING OF GLORY. SELAH (*ibid.*). When he said that to them, they immediately calmed down. If he had not done so, they would have sought to crush his head and kill him.⁸

In one other version, the passage from Psalm 24 is again arranged as a dialogue between Solomon and the gates. But here, Solomon convinces the gates to open without having to draw upon David's merit:

When Solomon sought to bring the Ark into the Temple, he said, LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES, AND BE YE LIFTED UP, YE EVERLASTING DOORS (Ps. 24:7), because the opening was too low. So he said, BE YE LIFTED UP, YE EVERLASTING DOORS; THAT THE KING OF GLORY MAY COME IN. The gates replied, WHO THEN IS THE KING OF GLORY? (*ibid.* 10). The gates would have immediately

7. Tanhuma, Va'era 7; Tanhuma Buber, Va'era 6; Shemot Rabbah 8:1. There is an aborted version of this account in Midrash Tehillim 24:10:

You find that when Solomon built the Temple, he sought to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, but the opening was too small. It was five cubits high and two and a half cubits wide, while the Ark was one and a half cubits high and one and a half cubits wide. Can't one and a half cubits fit inside two and a half? Ah, but at that moment the gates clung together.

8. *Ibid.*; *ibid.*; *ibid.*

sought to fall upon him and crush his head, had he not said, THE LORD OF HOSTS, HE IS THE KING OF GLORY. SELAH (*ibid.*). And he said further, THE LORD STRONG AND MIGHTY, THE LORD MIGHTY IN BATTLE (*ibid.* 8). LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES--he said to them, "Make yourselves larger, for the King of glory is upon you." Immediately they showed Him honor and raised themselves up, and the Ark went in. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, "You showed me honor; by your lives, when I destroy My house, no man shall rule over you." Let it be known that all the vessels of the Temple were taken into exile, as it is said, AND THE LORD GAVE JEHOIAKIM KING OF JUDAH INTO /Nebuchadnezzar's/ HAND, WITH PART OF THE VESSELS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD (Dan. 1:2). But the gates of the Temple were hidden in their place, as it is said, HER GATES ARE SUNK INTO THE GROUND (Lam 2:9).⁹

Solomon's prayers before the opening of the Holy of Holies may not have worked for him. But they became the model for supplication before God:

To what do the twenty-four /benedictions in the Tefillah/ said on a fast day correspond? R. Helbo said: To the twenty-four times that Solomon used the expression "prayer" etc., on the occasion when he brought the Ark into the Holy of Holies. If that is the case, why don't we say them every day? When did Solomon say them? On a day of supplication. We also say them on a day of supplication.¹⁰

9. Bemidbar Rabbah 15:13.

10. Berachot 29a (Soncino, p. 176). See below, pp. 36ff, for other midrashim in which Solomon's prayer is a model.

Solomon brought up the Ark as part of the dedication of the Temple. The rabbis took up several other issues in connection with the dedication. There was, for instance the question of its exact date:

Solomon finished the work of the Temple in the month of Marheshvan--IN THE ELEVENTH YEAR, IN THE MONTH BUL, /WHICH IS THE EIGHTH MONTH,/ WAS THE HOUSE FINISHED (I Kings 6:38). What does it mean, IN THE MONTH BUL / בּוּל/? In the month in which the Holy One, blessed be He, brought the flood / הַמַּבּוּל.¹ But it remained locked for twelve months. Everyone grumbled about Solomon, saying, "He's the son of Bath-sheba, isn't he? So how could the Holy One, blessed be He, cause his Shechinah to rest within the work of his hands?" But God calculated it so that he could combine the celebration of the Temple with the month in which Abraham was born, IN THE MONTH ETHANIM, /WHICH IS THE SEVENTH MONTH/ (*ibid.* 8:2), namely, the month Tishrei. And how do we know that the month Ethanim is the month in which Abraham was born? Because it is said, MASCHIL OF ETHAN THE EZRAHITE (Ps. 89:1).² And

1. See above, p. 5.
2. According to rabbinic tradition, this phrase refers to Abraham, who is thus the author of this psalm (see Midrash Tehillim 1:6, Baba Batra 15a, and Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3). A connection between Abraham and מַשְׁכִּיל הָעֶזְרָאִי (THE EZRAHITE) is made possible by Midrash Tehillim 110:1, which connects Abraham to a similar word, (/THE MAN/ FROM THE EAST):

R. Reuben said: Because the nations of the earth were asleep, they did not come under the wings of the Presence. And who roused them up to come take refuge under His wings? Abraham, as is said WHO RAISED UP? THE MAN FROM THE EAST (Isa. 4:12). (Braude, Vol. 2, p. 205)

Rosh Hashanah 11a also establishes Tishrei as the month of Abraham's birth:

R. Eliezer said: Whence do we know that the Patriarchs were born in Tishrei? Because it says, AND ALL THE MEN OF ISRAEL ASSEMBLED THEMSELVES UNTO KING SOLOMON, AT THE FEAST IN THE MONTH ETHANIM /אֶתְנַיִם/, WHICH IS THE SEVENTH MONTH (I Kings 8:2); that is, the month in which the mighty ones of the world /אֲדֹנָיִם לְעוֹלָם, i.e., the Patriarchs/ were born. (Soncino, p. 40)

for all those twelve months that it remained locked, even though all the work of the Temple was finished, it was locked up as though no one had done any work at all. When it was opened in the month of the festivals, and Solomon offered the sacrifices and the fire descended, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Now the work is complete" / שָׁלֵם הָיָה / --THUS ALL THE WORK / THAT KING SOLOMON WROUGHT IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD / WAS FINISHED / וְכָל עֲמָלֵי דָוִד / (I Kings 7:51). But wasn't Marheshvan shortchanged? No. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "It will be my responsibility to repay / לְשַׁלֵּם / it" --THUS ALL THE WORK...WAS FINISHED . / וְכָל עֲמָלֵי דָוִד / .³

The fire which descended to consume the dedicatory offering was here, as elsewhere, a special sign of God's favor:

MY BELOVED IS GONE DOWN TO HIS GARDEN (Song 6:2). This refers to the day when the heavenly fire descended to consume the sacrifice of Abel; and so too with the sacrifice of Noah; likewise with Nadab and Abihu; so too with the sacrifice of Manoah and Solomon and Elijah.⁴

The fire was not a one-time sign, but a continuing symbol of God's favor:

R. Aha b. Ammi /said/: The fire which descended from the heavens in the days of Moses did not depart from the brazen altar until the days of Solomon, and the fire which descended in the days of Solomon did not depart until Manasseh came along, and then it departed.⁵

Like the heavenly fire, the animals of the dedicatory sacrifice were themselves miraculous. Speaking of the oxen used by the princes

3. Pesikta Rabbati 6, pp. 24b-25a.

4. Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 6:2.

5. Zevahim 61b. See above, p. 27.

to bring their gifts at the dedication of the Tabernacle, the midrash asks:

How long did they live? /Some say until the altar at Gilgal; some say until the altar at Nob; some say until the altar at Gibeon; some say until the altar at Shilo./ But our masters say they were sacrificed at the Temple. R. Hama said: The support for our masters is written, AND KING SOLOMON OFFERED A SACRIFICE OF THE OXEN (II Chron. 7:5). "A sacrifice of oxen" is not what is said, but rather, "a sacrifice of the oxen." Which oxen? It says, TWO WAGONS AND FOUR OXEN (Num. 7:7). And it is written, AND FOUR WAGONS AND EIGHT OXEN (ibid. 8).⁶

The rabbis used Solomon's prayer at the dedication for various homiletical purposes. Commenting on Ex. 22:24, IF THOU LEND MONEY TO ANY OF MY PEOPLE, this midrash includes metaphysical reflections in a sermon exalting the poor and condemning the rich who take interest:

When Solomon built the Temple, he said to the Holy One, blessed be He, in his prayer, "Lord of the universe, if a man prays to you that You should give him money, and You know that it is bad for him, don't give it to him. But if You see a man for whom wealth is fitting, give it to him." As it is said, AND RENDER UNTO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO ALL HIS WAYS, WHOSE HEART THOU KNOWEST (II Chron. 6:30). It may be that in this world, the wicked are rich and are granted peace and quiet, while the righteous are poor, but in the future to come, when the Holy One, blessed be He, opens the treasure houses of the Garden of Eden to the righteous, the wicked who devoured interest / לַאֲשֵׁרִי / and usury are destined to bite / לְנֹשְׁכֵי / their own flesh with their own teeth.⁷

Solomon's prayer was also taken as a model of humility

-
6. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 6:10; 2:31; Midrash Tehillim 101:4; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, section 192, p. 376b.
 7. Shemot Rabbah 31:5.

before God:

Solomon said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the universe, a king who hires good workers, and they do their work well, and the king gives them their proper wage, what praise does that king deserve? When is he really to be praised? When he hires lazy workers, and yet gives them their full wage. "So," said Solomon, "our ancestors did their work and received a good reward. Where is the special goodness here? They worked and they were repaid. But we are lazy workers. Give us a good reward. That would be a great goodness." And so he said, THE LORD OUR GOD BE WITH US, AS HE WAS WITH OUR FATHERS (I Kings 8:57).⁸

Solomon's prayer taught other lessons about prayer in general:

Abba Benjamin said: A person's prayer / תפלה / is only heard in the synagogue, as it is said, TO HEARKEN UNTO THE CRY / רנה / AND UNTO THE PRAYER / תפלה / WHICH THY SERVANT PRAYETH BEFORE THEE (I Kings 8:28). תפלה should be in the place where there is רנה. Perhaps a person can ask for his needs, and afterwards pray / תתפלל /? This has already been clearly established by Solomon--TO HEARKEN UNTO THE רנה AND UNTO THE תפלה. רנה here means prayer / תפלה /, and תפלה here means request.⁹

Solomon began his prayer with praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, THERE IS NO GOD LIKE THEE (I Kings 8:23). And afterwards he prayed for the needs of Israel--IF THERE BE FAMINE IN THE LAND (*ibid.* 37). And then he closed once again with praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, NOW THEREFORE ARISE, O LORD GOD, INTO THY RESTING-PLACE (II Chron. 6:41). /David and Moses also followed this pattern in prayer./ And even

8. Midrash Tehillim 26:3.

9. Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, section 190, p. 376a.

the Shmoneh Esreh which the early sages ordained that Israel should pray did not begin with the needs of Israel until they had first praised God--"The great, mighty and awesome God," "Holy are You, and awesome is Your name"; and afterwards, "Who sets free the captives and heals the sick"; and after that, "We gratefully acknowledge before You."¹⁰

But Solomon's example was not to be followed in all details, since some of what he did is unique to the prayer of a king:

R. Joshua b. Levi said in the name of Bar Kapara: These are the blessings during which a person should bow down: at the beginning and end of the Avot, and at the beginning and end of the Hoda'ah. If one gets in the habit of bowing at the end of every blessing, he should be taught not to bow. The High Priest bows at the beginning and end of every blessing. But a king, once he kneels down, does not stand up /until he is completely finished/, as it is written, AND IT WAS SO, THAT WHEN SOLOMON HAD MADE AN END OF PRAYING ALL THIS PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION UNTO THE LORD, HE AROSE FROM BEFORE THE ALTAR OF THE LORD. FROM KNEELING ON HIS KNEES (I Kings 8:54).¹¹

This hierarchical awareness is applied to another part of Solomon's prayer:

R. Hisda said: Between the king and the public, the king enters first into the courtroom, as it is said, TO DO THE JUDGEMENT OF HIS SERVANT AND THE JUDGEMENT OF HIS PEOPLE (I Kings 8:59). Why is this? Because it is not polite to keep the king waiting outside.¹²

Solomon's prayer actually revealed the true reason for the existence of the Temple:

From the start Solomon built the Temple on one

10. Ibid., section 192, p. 376b; Sifre Deut. 343.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

condition, namely, that anyone with a problem should come there and pray about it, /as he said/, IF THERE BE IN THE LAND FAMINE, IF THERE BE PESTILENCE, IF THERE BE BLASTING OR MILDEW, LOCUST OR CATERPILLAR; IF THEIR ENEMY BESIEGE THEM IN THE LAND OF THEIR CITIES; WHATSOEVER PLAGUE, WHATSOEVER SICKNESS THERE BE; WHAT PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION SOEVER BE MADE BY ANY MAN (I Kings 8:37-8). This only applies to individuals. How do I know it applies to the community as well? It says, OF ALL THY PEOPLE ISRAEL (*ibid.* 38). This applies only to Israel. How do I know it applies to foreigners as well? It says, MOREOVER CONCERNING THE STRANGER THAT IS NOT OF THY PEOPLE ISRAEL (*ibid.* 41). How do I know it applies to one who requests children or even material possessions? It says, WHAT PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION SOEVER. Perhaps it applies also to one who requests children or possessions, and such would not be good for him? It says, /RENDER UNTO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO ALL HIS WAYS,/ WHOSE HEART THOU KNOWEST--FOR THOU, EVEN THOU ONLY, KNOWEST THE HEARTS OF ALL THE CHILDREN OF MEN (*ibid.* 39); what is good for him, give him. And how do I know that one should not hold fast to one's rebelliousness? It says, WHO SHALL KNOW EVERY MAN THE PLAGUE OF HIS OWN HEART, AND SPREAD FORTH HIS HANDS TOWARD THIS HOUSE (*ibid.* 38).¹³

Another midrash expands the idea of the Temple as a house of prayer for all people:

R. Joshua b. Levi said: If the nations of the world had realized how beneficial the Temple was to them, they would have surrounded it with forts to protect it, since it was more beneficial to them than to Israel, as Solomon said in his prayer, MOREOVER CONCERNING THE STRANGER THAT IS NOT OF THY PEOPLE ISRAEL, WHEN HE SHALL COME OUT OF A FAR COUNTRY FOR THY GREAT NAME'S SAKE, AND THY MIGHTY HAND AND THINE OUTSTRETCHED ARM; WHEN THEY SHALL COME AND PRAY TOWARD THIS HOUSE; THEN HEAR THOU FROM HEAVEN, EVEN FROM THY DWELLING-PLACE, AND DO ACCORDING TO ALL THAT THE STRANGER CALLETH TO THEE FOR; THAT ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH MAY KNOW THY NAME, AND FEAR THEE, AS DOTH THY PEOPLE ISRAEL, AND

13. Masechet Semahot 6:12.

THAT THEY MAY KNOW THAT THY NAME IS CALLED UPON THIS HOUSE WHICH I HAVE BUILT (II Chron. 6:32-3). But when he speaks of Israel, what is written: RENDER UNTO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO ALL HIS WAYS, WHOSE HEART THOU KNOWEST (*ibid.* 30). Solomon said, "Lord of the universe, if he's worthy, give it to him, but if not, don't."¹⁴

The rabbis used Solomon's introduction to his prayer to teach a further lesson about the role of houses of prayer in general:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, "Make Me a dwelling place," he was astounded, and said, "The glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the upper worlds and the lower worlds, yet He says, 'Make Me a dwelling place'!" Furthermore, he looked and saw Solomon arising and building the Temple, which is larger than the Tabernacle, and saying before the Holy One, blessed be He, BUT WILL GOD IN VERY TRUTH DWELL ON THE EARTH? (I Kings 8:27). Moses said, "Surely if Solomon says this about the Temple, which is so much larger than the Tabernacle, wouldn't it be even truer in regard to the Tabernacle?"...But the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I don't have in mind what you have in mind. You just build twenty boards on the north, twenty on the south, and eight on the west, and I will descend and contract my Shechinah within the space of a cubic cubit."¹⁵

Although unrelated to the dedication, the following midrash also portrays the Temple as the model for future houses of prayer:

Solomon saw that the observance of loving-kindness was great before the Holy One, blessed be He. When he built the Temple he erected two gates, one for the bridegrooms, and the other for the mourners and the excommunicated. On Sabbaths the Israelites went and sat between those two gates; and they knew that anyone who entered through the gate of the bridegrooms was a bride-groom, and they said to him, "May he who

14. Tanhuma Buber, Bemidbar 3.

15. Shemot Rabbah 34:1.

dwells in this house cause thee to rejoice with sons and daughters." If one entered through the gate of the mourners with his upper lip covered, then they knew that he was a mourner, and they would say to him, "May He who dwells in this house comfort thee." If one entered through the gate of the mourners without having his upper lip covered, then they knew that he was excommunicated, and they would say to him, "May He who dwells in this house put into thy heart (the desire) to listen to the words of thy associates, and may He put into the hearts of thy associates that they may draw thee near (to themselves), so that all Israel may discharge their duty by rendering the service of loving-kindness."

When the Temple was destroyed, the sages instituted (the rule) that the bridegrooms and mourners go to the synagogue and to the houses of study. The men of the place see the bridegroom and rejoice with him; and they see the mourner and sit with him upon the earth, so that all the Israelites may discharge their duty in the service of loving-kindness.¹⁶

Turning now to details of the dedicatory celebration, we find another comparison between Solomon and Moses:

It has been taught in a Baraitha: Solomon celebrated seven days of dedication. Why did Moses see fit to celebrate twelve days of dedication? In order to show honor to the /twelve/ princes.¹⁷

The rabbis tried to picture what must have been a marvelous celebration. The following is a somewhat esoteric version, reading Song of Songs 2:14 as an allegory on the dedication of the Temple:

R. Tanhuma said: Others may interpret this

16. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer 17 (Friedlander, pp. 122-3); Masechet Soferim 19.

17. Horayot 6b.

verse, as does R. Meir, as describing the dedication of the Tent of Meeting. But we will interpret it, as do our masters, as referring to the dedication of the Temple. O MY DOVE, THAT ART IN THE CLEFTS OF THE ROCK means that the people were hidden in the secret place of the Temple. LET ME SEE THY COUNTENANCE relates to the verse, THEN SOLOMON ASSEMBLED, etc. (I Kings 8:1). LET ME HEAR THY VOICE / לִשְׁמֹעַ / relates to the verse, IT CAME TO PASS THAT THE TRUMPETERS AND SINGERS WERE AS ONE, CAUSING ONE SOUND / כְּאֶחָד / TO BE HEARD (II Chron. 5:13). R. Abin said in the name of R. Abba Kohen b. Daliah: It is written, AND ALL THE PEOPLE ANSWERED TOGETHER (Ex. 19:8), and it is written, AND ALL THE PEOPLE ANSWERED WITH ONE VOICE (Ex. 24:3). How long did the people have that voice? Until IT CAME TO PASS THAT THE TRUMPETERS AND SINGERS WERE AS ONE, CAUSING ONE SOUND TO BE HEARD. FOR SWEET IS THY VOICE refers to the Song itself.¹⁸ AND THY COUNTENANCE IS COMELY refers to the sacrifices.¹⁹

Apparently, the celebration was so festive that everyone got carried away:

GO THY WAY, EAT THY BREAD WITH JOY, AND DRINK THY WINE WITH A MERRY HEART; FOR GOD HATH ALREADY ACCEPTED THY WORKS (Eccl. 9:7). This refers to Solomon. When he built the Temple and finished it, what did he do? He celebrated another seven days of Sukkot. And everyone forgot to observe Yom Kippur, and they were grieved. R. Isaac said: A heavenly voice went forth and said to Solomon, GO THY WAY, EAT THY BREAD WITH JOY, etc.²⁰

Despite the oversight, then, the celebration came to a very happy

-
18. Cf. the notion that Solomon composed the Song when the Temple was completed, p. 2.
19. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 2:31. The connection with the sacrifices is obscure.
20. Tanhuma Buber, addendum to Shelah, 17; Bemidbar Rabbah 17:2.

conclusion indeed:

ON THE EIGHTH DAY HE SENT THE PEOPLE AWAY, AND THEY BLESSED THE KING, AND WENT UNTO THEIR TENTS JOYFUL AND GLAD OF HEART FOR ALL THE GOODNESS THAT THE LORD HAD SHOWN UNTO DAVID HIS SERVANT, AND TO ISRAEL HIS PEOPLE (I Kings 8:66). AND THEY WENT UNTO THEIR TENT means that they found their wives in a state of purity. JOYFUL means that they enjoyed the splendor of the Shechinah /a euphemism for intercourse/. AND GLAD OF HEART means that the wives of each of them became pregnant and bore sons. FOR ALL THE GOODNESS THAT THE LORD HAD SHOWN UNTO DAVID HIS SERVANT, AND TO ISRAEL HIS PEOPLE means that He forgave David for the sin of Bath-sheba, and Israel for the sin of forgetting Yom Kippur.²¹

In spite of the happy ending, this episode teaches that one should not mingle two joyous occasions.²² As we read in Chapter 2 , pages 59ff , Solomon mingled another celebration, that of his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, with that of the Temple, and God was not so forgiving.

The rabbis wondered whether Solomon's consecration was good for all time, even after the destruction of his Temple, and then of the Second Temple. In the Mishnah, the opinion is that it was in fact good for all time.²³ In the Talmud there is disagreement.²⁴

21. Shabbat 30a; Mo'ed Katan 9a; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, section 193, p. 376b. In the latter two sources, the heavenly voice tells the people, "You are all appointed for everlasting life."

22. Mo'ed Katan 9a; Yalkut Shim'oni, loc. cit.

23. Eduyot 8:6.

24. Shevu'ot 16a.

VII

Naturally, the rabbis saw the building of the Temple as Solomon's greatest achievement. He was rewarded for it in his own lifetime:

AND SOLOMON SAT UPON THE THRONE OF DAVID HIS FATHER AND HIS KINGDOM WAS ESTABLISHED FIRMLY (I Kings 2:12). /A Judean/ said: What great achievement, it may be asked, is here ascribed to Solomon? The truth is that he prepared the foundation stone and set over it the Holy of Holies, and for this his kingdom was established firmly.¹

His descendant Hezekiah sought to draw upon Solomon's merit when he fell critically ill:

THEN HEZEKIAH TURNED HIS FACE TO THE WALL, AND PRAYED UNTO THE LORD (Is. 38:2). What is the significance of the wall? ... R. Levi said about the matter of the wall: /Hezekiah/ said before God, "Lord of the universe, if you brought back to life the son of the Shunamite woman, who made only one small wall /חֶמֶד קָטָן/, "chamber" -- II Kings 4:10/, shouldn't You then have all the more reason to revive me, since my father's father overlaid the whole Temple with silver and gold?"²

Perhaps even more significant than his building of the Temple was his eagerness and devotion to the task, which won him merit both in his own lifetime and in his afterlife as well:

SEEST THOU A MAN DILIGENT IN HIS WORK (Prov. 22:29). This refers to Solomon. What work? The work of the Temple. You find that when he built his own house, he took thirteen years /I Kings 7:1/, but when he built the Temple, he took seven years /I Kings 6:37-8/Now one who hears that Solomon

-
1. Zohar, Bereshit 72b (Soncino I, p. 245). The Holy of Holies has special mystical significance, as in this passage:

As soon as /Solomon/ had completed the making of the Holy of Holies below, the mystery of the Holy of Holies above ascended and was hidden, so that the concealment of the Union might be complete above and below, according to the Divine purpose. (Zohar, Shemot 145b; Soncino IV, p. 12)

2. Berachot 10b.

took thirteen years to build his own house and seven to build the house of the Holy One, blessed be He, might conclude that his own house was bigger than that of the Holy One, blessed be He. But it wasn't. Rather, he took his time about building his own house, but he wasted no time during the building of the house of the Holy One, blessed be He. In so doing he put the honor of the Holy One, blessed be He, before his own /unlike David³/...and because he was energetic in the building of the Temple, he deserved to be included among the righteous kings /rather than with the wicked ones, as he otherwise would have deserved⁴/.... And not only that, said R. Levi, but he also became the head of a genealogical line -- NOW THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF PEREZ: PEREZ BEGOT HEZRON, etc., until AND JESSE BEGOT DAVID (Ruth 4:18 -22). The text should have continued, "And David begot Solomon." But instead it says, AND SOLOMON'S SON WAS REHOBOAM, etc. (I Chron. 3:10). Why was this? Because he was energetic in the work of the Temple. And the work of the Temple itself spread peace over him, as it is written, THUS ALL THE WORK WAS FINISHED / כִּלְתָּה שְׁלֵמֹן / (I Kings 7:51), meaning, "all the work was peace" / כִּלְתָּה שְׁלֵמֹן/.⁵

To this list of rewards, another version adds one more, namely, that because of his diligent work, the Holy Spirit rested upon him and he composed his three books, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes.⁶

-
3. This portion of the midrash is discussed in Chapter 9 , p. 231
 4. This portion of the midrash is discussed in Chapter 6 , p. 181.
 5. Pesikta Rabbati 6, pp. 23b-24a.
 6. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:5. This is discussed also in Chapter 7, pp. 182ff.

VIII

The sheer mass of the material in this chapter testifies to the central importance of the Temple in midrashic thought about Solomon. The Temple was far and away Solomon's greatest achievement. This achievement constituted the strongest single pillar supporting Solomon's positive reputation in the midrash.

The magnitude of the achievement derives from the transcendent importance of the Temple itself. Like the Tabernacle before it, the Temple was a physical symbol of God's presence on earth, among His people. As with the Tabernacle, the people hurried to build it, lavished all their wealth and skill upon it, and looked to it for protection and atonement. But unlike the Tabernacle, the Temple was stationary. Furthermore, it was built at the height of Israel's political dominion, during the reign of its wealthiest king. All these elements served to invest the Temple with a symbolic significance beyond that of the Tabernacle. The Temple symbolized God's presence, but stabilized now within a settled and prosperous nation. This was the ideal situation, thus explaining the presence of midrashim in which the Temple is said to have perfected the cosmos. Such an ideal state was to be recovered only in messianic times.

From this central idea two subsidiary motifs naturally emerge: the Temple was completely unique; man alone could not have built it. The first of these is expressed in all of the extravagant portrayals of the unparalleled, miraculous beauty of the place. It is revealed most clearly, though, in the interesting midrash about the craftsmen, who died upon completing their work (page 15). The second motif, closely related to the first, is expressed in all the accounts of the miraculous assistance Solomon and his workers received. The whole

universe lent a hand, for only thus could an appropriate structure have been built. This motif also explains the midrashim recounting Solomon's difficulties bringing up the Ark (or calling down the fire). Solomon was being reminded that not he, but forces far more powerful than he, had really built the Temple.

As an ideal "house of God", the Temple served as a model for the synagogue. And the premier function of the synagogue found specific biblical precedent in Solomon's dedicatory prayer, which the rabbis used to add force to the precedent.

Though man alone could not have built the Temple, still Solomon received most of the credit given to mankind. It was his zeal which pushed the work to completion. As an agent, he contributed mightily to תִּקּוּן עוֹלָם.

And yet, as with all his other positive attributes, his wisdom, his wealth, his power, his writings, the rabbis refused to see the triumph as untarnished. At the very moment of completion, Solomon was pictured falling into his deepest sin, his ultimately idolatrous marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. The rabbis refused to idolize Solomon even in his moment of glory. In fact, they said that Solomon's merit from the Temple just managed to outweigh his sins. For the rabbis, the Temple may have been a transcendent structure, but its chief builder remained a mere king of flesh and blood.

I

Spectacular in everything, Solomon was a spectacular sinner as well in the rabbinic view. We read in Chapter 1, pp. 30f, of his boastfulness upon completing the Temple. But his really serious sins were these three:

/Solomon/ committed three sins: he acquired many horses, he acquired many wives and he acquired much silver and gold.¹

These sins were in direct violation of specific prohibitions in Deuteronomy. The rabbis asked themselves how Solomon, so celebrated for his wisdom, could have gone astray so blatantly. Their answer -- his wisdom was the cause of his sin!

It is written, AND I TURNED MYSELF TO BEHOLD WISDOM, AND MADNESS AND FOLLY; FOR WHAT CAN THE MAN DO THAT COMETH AFTER THE KING? EVEN THAT WHICH HATH BEEN ALREADY DONE (Eccl. 2:12). This verse refers to Solomon....How? When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, He put in it positive and negative commandments, and He gave the king a few extra commandments, as it is said, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY HORSES TO HIMSELF....NEITHER SHALL HE MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF, THAT HIS HEART TURN NOT AWAY; NEITHER SHALL HE MULTIPLY TO HIMSELF SILVER AND GOLD (Deut. 17:16-17). Solomon the king arose and tried to be wiser than the prohibition of the Holy One, blessed be He. He said, "Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, say, NEITHER SHALL HE MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF? Wasn't it so that /the king's/ heart should not turn away? Well, I will multiply wives, and my heart will not turn away." Our masters said: At that very moment the "yod" in יָרִבּוֹ ("he shall /not/ multiply") went up and prostrated itself before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, "Lord of the worlds, didn't You say, 'Not a letter shall ever be nullified from the Torah'? Now Solomon

1. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10.

arises and nullifies me.² If he nullifies me today, tomorrow he may nullify something else, until the whole Torah has been nullified." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to it, "Solomon and a thousand like him will be nullified, but not one jot of you will I nullify!"...Solomon thought to nullify a letter from the Torah. What is written of him? THE WORDS OF AGUR / אגור / THE SON OF JAKEH / יקה / (Prov. 30:1), meaning that he collected / קלף / the words of Torah and then vomited / ריף / them up again; THE MAN SAITH UNTO ITHIEL (ibid.), meaning that this thing which the Holy One, blessed be He, said, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF, He said only so that HIS HEART TURN NOT AWAY;³ UNTO ITHIEL AND UCAL / יתאל ואל / (ibid.), meaning that Solomon said, "God is with me, so I can do anything" / אלהים עממי /.⁴ What else is written of him? IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, THAT HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART / AFTER OTHER GODS / (I Kings 11:4). R. Simeon b. Yohai said: It would have been better for Solomon to be a gutter-cleaner than to have this verse written about him. And so Solomon said, AND I TURNED MYSELF TO BEHOLD WISDOM, AND MADNESS AND FOLLY. Solomon said, "I thought myself wiser than the words of Torah and pictured myself as knowing the wisdom of Torah, but that understanding and knowledge were of madness and folly. Why? FOR WHAT CAN THE MAN DO THAT COMETH AFTER THE KING? EVEN THAT WHICH HATH BEEN ALREADY DONE. Who is allowed to question the principles and decrees of the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, things which are carved out before Him? For everything which issues from Him, He first consults with the heavenly court and announces it to them, so that they may all understand

-
2. The "yod" applies the prohibition to the king alone. If he doesn't observe it, no one would. See the note in the Mirkin edition of Shemot Rabbah, p. 107.
 3. This perhaps means that God said, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF, so that Solomon's heart would not turn away, and would remain "with God" / אלהים עממי /.
 4. For this and other midrashim on Solomon's names, see Chapter 11.

and bear witness that His judgment is true and His decrees are right and all His words are wise. And so it says, EVERY WORD OF GOD IS TRIED (Prov. 30:5); and it says, THE MATTER IS BY THE DECREE OF THE WATCHERS, /AND THE SENTENCE BY THE WORD OF THE HOLY ONES/ (Dan. 4:14). Because I questioned His doings I erred."⁵

Solomon's wisdom led him to the presumptuous error of questioning God's decrees. Bad as this error seems, the above midrash treats Solomon gently. He is pictured as intending not to sin, and then later recognizing his mistake. And the midrash says, "I erred," not "I sinned." The following midrash also treats him gently:

SURELY OPPRESSION /רָשָׁעָה, read by the rabbis as רָשָׁעָה, "preoccupation"/ TURNETH A WISE MAN INTO A FOOL (Ecc1. 7:7). Because Solomon occupied himself /רָשָׁעָה/ with pointless concerns, they led him into error -- IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, etc. (I Kings 11:4). /The midrash about the "yod" follows, with minor variations. Then --/ And what caused him /to err/? It's because he occupied himself with things for which he had no need.⁶

Here, Solomon's error is portrayed not so much as presumption, but more as mere useless preoccupation. Preoccupation with what is never clearly stated, but we know it is preoccupation with the divine reasoning behind the prohibitions of Deut. 17:16-17. Another midrash makes this explicit, and also tends to exculpate Solomon even more:

R. Isaac said: Why weren't the explanations of the /laws of the/ Torah revealed? Because in two verses where the explanations were revealed, the greatest person in the world erred. It is written, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY WIVES /TO HIMSELF, THAT HIS HEART

5. Shemot Rabbah 6:1; Vayikra Rabbah 19:2; Bemidbar Rabbah 10:4; Kohelet Rabbah 1:2; Sanhedrin 13a.

6. Tanhuma, Va'era 4; Tanhuma Buber, Va'era, p. 18.

TURN NOT AWAY/ (Deut. 17:17). Solomon said, "I will multiply, and I will not turn away." But it is written, IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, THAT HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART (I Kings 11:4). And it is written, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY HORSES TO HIMSELF, /NOR CAUSE THE PEOPLE TO RETURN TO EGYPT, TO THE END THAT HE SHOULD MULTIPLY HORSES/ (Deut. 17:16). Solomon said, "I will multiply, and I will not cause the people to return." But it is written, /AND THE HORSES WHICH SOLOMON HAD WERE BROUGHT OUT OF EGYPT.../ AND A CHARIOT CAME UP AND WENT OUT OF EGYPT FOR SIX HUNDRED SHEKELS OF SILVER (I Kings 10:28-29).⁷

Solomon did not intend to go astray, but he was seduced by the text itself. By explaining itself, the text only tempted Solomon to go beyond it. Nevertheless, he was punished for his error, said the rabbis:

In another comment the words /previously rendered, I SAID OF LAUGHTER: "IT IS MINGLED" (Eccl. 2:2)/ are now rendered, I SAID OF THAT WHICH IS PUNISHABLE: IT IS RADIANT.⁸ According to R. Aha, Solomon said: I was drawn by their radiance to three things which the Attribute of Justice deems punishable /and warns against/. Scripture warns, NEITHER SHALL /a king/ MULTIPLY WIVES (Deut. 17:17), yet it is said of me, HE HAD SEVEN HUNDRED WIVES, PRINCESSES, AND THREE HUNDRED CONCUBINES (I Kings 11:3); Scripture warns, /a king/ SHALL NOT MULTIPLY HORSES TO HIMSELF (Deut. 17:16), yet it is said of me, SOLOMON HAD FORTY THOUSAND STALLS OF HORSES FOR HIS CHARIOTS, AND TWELVE THOUSAND HORSEMEN (I Kings 5:6); Scripture warns, NEITHER SHALL HE GREATLY MULTIPLY TO HIMSELF SILVER AND GOLD (Deut. 17:17), yet it is said of me, THE KING MADE SILVER TO BE IN JERUSALEM AS ABUNDANT AS STONES (I Kings 10:27)....AND OF MIRTH /I said/: WHAT DOES IT DO? (Eccl. 2:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Solomon, "What is this crown doing in your hand? Get off My throne!" At that moment an angel in

7. Sanhedrin 21b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 11, section 195, p. 377a.

8. See Braude's Pesikta deRav Kahana, p. 394, notes 12 and 13.

Solomon's likeness descended and sat upon his throne. Solomon wandered among all the houses of assembly and all the houses of study in Jerusalem, saying to them, I KOHELET HAVE BEEN KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM (Ecc1. 1:12). But they replied, "Solomon the king is sitting on his throne, and you say, 'I am Solomon the king'!" Then what did they do to him? They tapped him with a length of reed /as is done to quiet a crazy man/ and gave him a dish of boiled grits to eat. At that moment he said, VANITY OF VANITIES, SAITH KOHELET (Ecc1. 1:2).⁹

Here again, Solomon is seduced, this time by the lure of the forbidden. God teaches him a lesson in the true value of material possessions. In another version of this story, though, Solomon's mistake is arrogance, and it is here called a transgression. God uses the same punishment to teach Solomon a lesson in humility:

THUS SAITH THE LORD: LET NOT THE WISE MAN GLORY IN HIS WISDOM (Jer. 9:22). This refers to Solomon, king of Israel. When he sat on the throne of his kingdom, he exalted himself and became arrogant and transgressed what is written in the Torah, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF (Deut. 17:17). He said, "I will multiply and not turn away from the path." /The passage about the "yod" follows. Then --/ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the "yod", "It is up to Me to argue your case and to render your judgment." Immediately He said to Ashmedai, king of the spirits, "Go to Solomon, and take his signet-ring from his hand." So he went and made himself into Solomon's likeness, and he sat on Solomon's throne, and Israel thought he was Solomon. Meanwhile Solomon wandered through the cities and the villages, saying, I KOHELET WAS KING (Ecc1. 1:12), until three years had passed. Now the people had been saying to each other, "How crazy this fellow is! The king is sitting on his throne, and this one says, 'I

9. Pesikta deRav Kahana 26:2 (Braude, pp. 394-5); Sanhedrin 12b-13a; Tanhuma, Aharei Mot 1; Tanhuma Buber, Aharei Mot 2; Kohelet Rabbah 2:3; Ruth Rabbah 5:6. In Zohar, Bereshit 250a (Soncino II, p. 390), there is an esoteric version of this midrash. Again, Solomon did not sin; he was led into error by his wisdom.

Kohelet was king.' Then the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I have now executed the judgment of the 'yod'." /The passage which follows tells how Ashmedai is unmasked. See Chapter 3, pp. 101f./ Then Benaiah removed the signet-ring from Ashmedai's hand and tried to kill him. But a heavenly voice went forth and said, "Don't touch him! This was all My doing, because Solomon transgressed what is written in the Torah." Immediately they restored Solomon to his throne, with his signet-ring on his hand, and he regained his own likeness, returning to his former beauty. Solomon said, "Where is my kingdom? Where is my strength? They have availed me nothing. But him who humbles himself the Holy One, blessed be He, exalts. As it is said, THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART, O GOD, THOU WILT NOT DESPISE (Ps. 51:19)."¹⁰

The previous midrashim have all laid various degrees of culpability upon Solomon, focusing on his wisdom as the source of his error. This next midrash accuses Solomon most harshly for deliberately violating the Torah. Here again, the question of Solomon's wisdom is central. And again, he is punished.

THEN I /wisdom, understood by the rabbis as Torah/ WAS BY /God/...PLAYING /תִּשְׁחַלֵּץ/ IN HIS HABITABLE EARTH, etc. (Prov. 8:30-1). Thus did the Holy One, blessed be He, raise the Torah. Anyone who tries to laugh at /בְּחִשְׁלֹשׁ/ the Torah, the Torah ends up laughing at him. There has been no man wiser than Solomon. But because he sought to nullify a "yod" from the Torah, look what happened to him! /The passage about the three violations and the "yod" follows. Then--/ /God said,/ "Although Solomon sought to nullify only a 'yod', I consider it as though he had sought to nullify the whole Torah." As it is said, WHEREFORE THE LORD SAID UNTO SOLOMON: "FORASMUCH AS THIS /תִּשְׁחַלֵּץ/ HATH BEEN IN THY MIND /תִּשְׁחַלֵּץ, read here as "with you"/, AND THOU HAST NOT KEPT MY COVENANT AND MY STATUTES" (I Kings 11:11). It is the Torah which is called "this" /תִּשְׁחַלֵּץ/, as it is said,

10. Neveh Sahlom, pp. 53-5.

AND THIS IS THE TORAH /תורה זו/ (Deut. 4:44). As for "hath been with you," it is said, AND IT /a copy of the three prohibitions from Deut. 17/ SHALL BE WITH /the king/, AND HE SHALL READ THEREIN ALL THE DAYS OF HIS LIFE (Deut. 17:19). "And yet," /said God/, "thusly you have behaved. So I WILL SURELY REND THE KINGDOM FROM THEE (I Kings 11:11)." Why? PLAYING IN HIS HABITABLE EARTH /i.e., the Torah laughs at mere mortals who try to tamper with it/.¹¹

Solomon's wisdom led him into error, said the rabbis. But they also said the opposite, that his wisdom kept him from sin:

AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING EXCEEDING MUCH, AND LARGENESS OF HEART, EVEN AS THE SAND THAT IS ON THE SEA-SHORE (I Kings 5:9). What does the phrase, EVEN AS THE SAND THAT IS ON THE SEA-SHORE, mean? R. Levi said: If this sand were not there surrounding the ocean and providing a barrier against it, the ocean would rise and inundate the world and destroy it. But the sand stands against it like a dam and a wall, and doesn't allow it to overflow over the world. Likewise the wisdom of Solomon surrounded him like a dam and a wall which surrounds the sea. In what way? When a person tries to do some unworthy thing and his wisdom does not surround his desire and rise up against it like this wall, he is capable of doing any evil. Solomon said, "To what can this be compared? To a city built with breaches, without a wall -- LIKE A CITY BROKEN DOWN AND WITHOUT A WALL, SO IS HE WHOSE SPIRIT IS WITHOUT RESTRAINT (Prov. 25:28)." The city which is broken down contains every evil thing. Robbers come into it, evil beasts come into it. Likewise a person whose wisdom does not surround his desire does many things which are unworthy. He causes many conflictsBut Solomon, when he tried to do something wrong, what would he do? His wisdom would rise up against his desire as the sand rises up against the ocean.¹²

The midrashim, then, suggest both potentialities of human wisdom

11. Aggadat Bereshit 75:2.

12. Pesikta Rabbati 14, pp. 59a-b; Tanhuma Buber, Hukat 10.

-- a guide for proper behavior, but also, as for Adam and Eve, a fallible faculty with a prideful tendency to try to exceed its own capabilities.¹³

13. For a detailed treatment of Solomon's wisdom, see Chapter 6. Section IX of that chapter deals with this same issue.

II

Of the three chief violations which Solomon committed, clearly the worst was his marrying so many foreign women, who then drew him away from worship of YHWH only (I Kings 11:1-8). The Bible gives this sin as the reason for the division of the kingdom after Solomon (*ibid.* 9-13). The rabbis sought to illuminate this particular sin in some detail.

According to the rabbis, Solomon confessed in Ecclesiastes his weakness for women:

AND WHATSOEVER MINE EYES DESIRED in the way
of women, I KEPT NOT FROM THEM: I WITHHELD NOT
MY HEART FROM ANY JOY (Eccl. 2:10). This
refers to the joy of women.¹

The rabbis emphasized how costly this weakness was to prove:

Didn't Solomon speak well when he said, WISDOM
IS BETTER THAN WEAPONS OF WAR (Eccl. 9:18). For
in all the wars which Israel waged when they
entered the land of Canaan, they could not
subdue the whole world as it was subdued under
Solomon by his wisdom...BUT ONE SINNER DE-
STROYETH MUCH GOOD (*ibid.*); as it is said,
AND THE LORD WAS ANGRY WITH SOLOMON, BECAUSE
HIS HEART WAS TURNED AWAY FROM THE LORD....
WHEREFORE THE LORD SAID UNTO SOLOMON: "FORAS-
MUCH AS THIS HATH BEEN IN THY MIND, AND THOU
HAST NOT KEPT MY COVENANT AND MY STATUTES,
WHICH I HAVE COMMANDED THEE, I WILL SURELY
REND THE KINGDOM FROM THEE" (I Kings 11:9,11).²

Solomon's wives became a symbol of all his sins, being chief among them. We can see this in a variant of a midrash we read above, section I, p. 50:

SURELY OPPRESSION / *חֲשָׁדָה*, read here as *חֲשָׁדָה*,
"preoccupation"/ TURNETH A WISE MAN INTO FOOL
(Eccl. 7:7)....Solomon's involvement in
matters for which there was no need led him

1. Kohelet Rabbah 2:13.

2. Pesikta Zutreta, Behar Sinai, p. 69b.

into error, as it is said, FOR IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, THAT HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART AFTER OTHER GODS (I Kings 11:4).³

If his wives were his chief sin, chief among his wives was Pharaoh's daughter. She had the most destructive influence upon Solomon:

NOW KING SOLOMON LOVED MANY FOREIGN WOMEN, AND THE DAUGHTER OF PHARAOH (I Kings 11:1). Pharaoh's daughter was one of the foreign women, so why is she singled out? To teach that he loved her more than all the others, and to signify that the sin into which she led him was greater than all the others.⁴

Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter was undeniably a disastrous turning point in his life. He reign was divided into two periods -- before and after the marriage:

One verse says, FOR THE LORD HATH CHOSEN ZION (Ps. 132:13). But another verse says, FOR THIS CITY /Jerusalem/ HATH BEEN TO ME A PROVOCATION OF MINE ANGER AND OF MY FURY FROM THE DAY THAT THEY BUILT IT EVEN UNTO THIS DAY (Jer. 32:31). The first refers to the time before Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter; the second to the time after he married her.⁵

Solomon's reign went awry after his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter because she led him into many other mistakes:

AND SOLOMON LOVED THE LORD, WALKING IN THE STATUTES OF DAVID HIS FATHER (I Kings 3:3). He did so for four years before he started building the Temple. But when he began building the Temple, then HE TOOK PHARAOH'S

3. Yalkut Shim'oni, Eccl. 7, section 973, p. 544b.

4. Sifre Deut. 52.

5. Niddah 70b. See section III below for other midrashim which divide Solomon's reign into before and after.

DAUGHTER, AND BROUGHT HER INTO THE CITY OF DAVID (ibid.). In the same section we read, /AND THE LORD RAISED UP AN ADVERSARY UNTO SOLOMON, HADAD THE EDMITE (ibid. 11:14);/ AND WHEN HADAD HEARD IN EGYPT /THAT DAVID SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS..., HADAD SAID TO PHARAOH: "LET ME DEPART, THAT I MAY GO TO MINE OWN COUNTRY"/ (ibid. 21). AND /Rezon/ WAS AN ADVERSARY TO ISRAEL ALL THE DAYS OF SOLOMON, BESIDE THE MISCHIEF THAT HADAD DID (ibid. 25). AND THE KING MADE SILVER TO BE IN JERUSALEM AS STONES (ibid. 10:27). AND THE HORSES WHICH SOLOMON HAD WERE BROUGHT OUT OF EGYPT (ibid. 28). AND A CHARIOT CAME UP AND WENT OUT OF EGYPT (ibid. 28). AND A CHARIOT CAME UP AND WENT OUT OF EGYPT FOR SIX HUNDRED SHEKELS OF SILVER (ibid. 29). NOW KING SOLOMON LOVED MANY FOREIGN WOMEN, BESIDES THE DAUGHTER OF PHARAOH (ibid. 11:1). For these reasons you find it says, FOR THIS CITY HATH BEEN TO ME A PROVOCATION OF MINE ANGER AND OF MY FURY FROM THE DAY THAT THEY BUILT IT (Jer. 32:31).⁶

The marriage brought punishment not only upon Israel in general, but also upon Solomon's descendants in particular:

AND I WILL FOR THIS AFFLICT THE SEED OF DAVID (I Kings 11:39). To what does FOR THIS refer? To the thirty-six years during which Solomon was married to Pharaoh's daughter.⁷

How could Solomon make such a mistake? With all his wisdom, he still needed a mentor:

R. Hiyya b. Ami said in the name of Ula: A person should always live near his teacher. As long as Shimei b. Gera was alive, Solomon

6. Seder Olam 15, p. 22a.

7. Ibid., p. 22b. There is another reference to these thirty-six years in the following section of Seder Olam, p. 23b. The thirty-six years after Solomon's death were considered compensation for his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. The affliction of the house of David would have ended, but Asa, the Davidic king at that time, was himself a sinner.

did not marry Pharaoh's daughter.⁸

Pharaoh's daughter was a disaster for Solomon from the very beginning. According to most midrashim, Solomon married her the same day he finished the Temple. She immediately ruined the dedication of the Temple:

R. Yudan said: During the seven years that Solomon was building the Temple he drank no wine. But when he finished the Temple and married Pharaoh's daughter, that same night he drank wine. There were then to excessive rejoicings -- one, the celebration of the building of the Temple; the other, the celebration of his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Which one should I welcome?" At that moment the thought arose in His mind to destroy the Temple, as it is written, FOR THIS CITY HATH BEEN TO ME A PROVOCATION OF MINE ANGER AND OF MY FURY FROM THE DAY THAT THEY BUILT IT (Jer. 32:31). R. Hillel b. R. Veles said: This is like a person who passes by a filthy place and turns up his nose.⁹ R. Honia said: Pharaoh's daughter danced three hundred kinds of dances. And Solomon slept till ten o'clock in the morning, with the keys of the Temple under his head, even though we learned that the morning sacrifice was to be offered at ten in the morning. How did she do this to him? She spread above him a tapestry of stars and constellations, and when he was about to get up, he would see them and think it was still night. Thus he slept until ten in the morning. His mother came in and rebuked him. Some say Jeroboam the son of Nevet came in and rebuked him. But how could he have /since that would have been extremely presumptuous/? R. Haggai said in the name of R. Isaac: He went and assembled eighty thousand members of his own tribe

8. Berachot 8a. On Shimei b. Gera, see Chapter 10, pp. 258ff.

9. This is based on a play on the word אֵרָא ("anger", also "nose") in the Jeremiah quote.

and went in and rebuked him.¹⁰

Bath-sheba's rebuke emphasizes Solomon's central error in this midrash, drunkenness:

IT IS NOT FOR KINGS, O LEMUEL, IT IS NOT FOR KINGS TO DRINK WINE (Prov. 31:4). IT IS NOT FOR KINGS -- /Bath-sheba/ said to /Solomon/, "What have you to do with kings who drink wine and become drunk and say, 'What do we need with God?'" NOR FOR PRINCES /וְלַמְּלָכִים/ TO SAY: "WHERE IS STRONG DRINK?" (ibid.) /She continued,/ "You to whom all the secrets /סֵתֵר/ of the universe are revealed, it is not for you to drink and become drunk."... And whence do we know that Solomon acknowledged the rebuke of his mother? It is written, SURELY I AM MORE BRUTISH THAN A MAN, AND HAVE NOT THE UNDERSTANDING OF A MAN (Prov. 30:2).¹¹

In another version, Solomon's acknowledgement clearly refers to his drunkenness and his wives:

SURELY I AM MORE BRUTISH THAN A MAN / אִנִּי / (Prov. 30:2). This refers to Noah, who is called אִנִּי, as it is said, NOAH WAS IN HIS GENERATIONS A MAN / אִנִּי / RIGHTEOUS AND WHOLE-HEARTED (Gen. 6:9). Solomon said, "I should have learned from Noah, who became drunk from wine and was punished for it...." AND I HAVE NOT THE UNDERSTANDING OF A MAN / אִנִּי / (Prov. 30:2). This refers to the first man, Adam / אִדָּם /. /Solomon said, "I should have learned from him./ He had only one wife, and she led him astray. I married a thousand women"....And sure enough, it is said, HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART (I Kings 11:4).¹²

While drunkenness is the central focus in the above version of Solomon's marriage night with Pharaoh's daughter, other motifs arise in different versions of the midrash. Along with some interesting

10. Vayikra Rabbah 12:5.

11. Sanhedrin 70b. For more on the rebukes of Bath-sheba and Jeroboam, see Chapter 10, pp. 256-8, 265-6.

12. Midrash Mishle 30, p. 104.

minor clarifications, these other topics are listed below, following the order of the midrash already quoted:

The celebration of Solomon's marriage to Bitya, Pharaoh's daughter, exceeded that of the celebration of the completion of the Temple, illustrating the saying, "Everyone flatters the king."¹³

Our masters said: Pharaoh's daughter presented a thousand kinds of songs to Solomon when he ordered her to play for him that night. She would say to him, "This is the song one sings while worshipping such and such an idol."¹⁴

She put in the tapestry all kinds of precious stones and gems, which shone like stars and constellations.¹⁵

R. Levi said: That day the daily offering was brought at ten o'clock in the morning. And we learned: It happened that the morning sacrifice was brought at ten in the morning. And Israel was distressed, since it was the day of the dedication of the Temple and they couldn't do a thing, because Solomon was asleep and they were afraid to awaken him because of their respect for the kingship. So they went and informed Bath-sheba his mother, and she went and woke him up and rebuked him.¹⁶

The most damning material here is the reference to idolatry.

Another version of it goes on to indicate the terrible punishment which his sin would bring upon Israel:

R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: When Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, she presented to him a thousand kinds of songs, and said to him, "Thus one does when worshipping

13. Bemidbar Rabbah 10:4; Midrash Mishle 30, p. 108.

14. Bemidbar Rabbah 10:4.

15. Ibid.; Soher Tov, Mishle 30.

16. Bemidbar Rabbah 10:4; Midrash Mishle 30, p. 108.

such and such an idol," and he didn't prohibit her from doing so. R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: When Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, Gabriel came down and fixed a reed in the sea. From it arose a sandbank upon which was built the great city of Rome.¹⁷

Solomon created another future problem by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. After Solomon's death, her father came to seize his special throne as payment, according to their marriage contract.¹⁸

Pharaoh's daughter created another, more immediate problem for Solomon. Apparently, she was an extravagant spender:

R. Isaac pointed out a contradiction. One verse says, SILVER WAS NOTHING ACCOUNTED OF IN THE DAYS OF SOLOMON (I Kings 10:21). But another says, AND THE KING MADE SILVER TO BE IN JERUSALEM AS STONES (*ibid.* 27) /i.e., silver had some small value after all/. But there is no contradiction. The first refers to the time before Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, and the second to the time after he married her.¹⁹

Further evidence of her extravagance comes from this midrash:

Rabbi Yohanan said: Why did Jeroboam deserve to become king? Because he rebuked Solomon.... AND THIS WAS THE CAUSE THAT /Jeroboam/ LIFTED UP HIS HAND AGAINST THE KING: SOLOMON BUILT MILLO, AND REPAIRED THE BREACH OF THE CITY OF DAVID HIS FATHER (I Kings 11:27). Jeroboam said to him, "David your father made breaches in the wall so that Israel could go up for pilgrimages, but you have closed them up to be able to collect forced labor for Pharaoh's daughter."²⁰

In fact, all of Solomon's wives were extravagant, contributing to

-
17. Shabbat 56b; Y. Avodah Zarah 39c; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:42; Sanhedrin 21b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 11, section 196, p. 377a.
 18. Kohelet Rabbah 9:1. See Chapter 4, pp. 115 and 116.
 19. Sanhedrin 21b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 10, section 195, p. 377a.
 20. Sanhedrin 101b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 11, section 196, 377a-b; Seder Eliahu Rabbah 24, p. 125.

the crushing burden which Solomon's opulent reign imposed upon the people:

I /God/ gave you /Israel/ one king, and you couldn't support him. Who was this? Solomon son of David. AND SOLOMON'S PROVISION FOR ONE DAY WAS THIRTY MEASURES OF FINE FLOUR, AND SIXTY MEASURES OF MEAL (I Kings 5:2).... R. Yudah said in the name of R. Zevida: Solomon had a thousand wives, and each one of them would prepare such a meal, thinking that he might dine with her.²¹

Yet, as clear as the biblical pronouncement seems, one rabbi defended Solomon's marriage with an apologetic argument:

NOW KING SOLOMON LOVED MANY FOREIGN WOMEN.... OF THE NATIONS CONCERNING WHICH THE LORD SAID UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: "YE SHALL NOT GO AMONG THEM, NEITHER SHALL THEY COME AMONG YOU" (I Kings 11:1-2). R. Joshua b. Levi said: So that you shouldn't marry them. /SOLOMON DID CLEAVE UNTO THESE IN LOVE (ibid. 2)./ R. Simeon b. Yohai said: IN LOVE means "in fornication." R. Eliezer the son of R. Jose Ha-gelili said: It is written, EVEN /Solomon/ DID THE FOREIGN WOMEN CAUSE TO SIN (Neh. 13:26). This teaches that he would have intercourse with them while they were impure and they would not inform him. R. Jose b. Halaftha said: IN LOVE means he caused them to love the One who loved them, to bring them near and to convert them and to bring them under the wings of the Shechinah. You must conclude that R. Joshua b. Levi and R. Simeon b. Yohai and R. Eliezer the son of R. Jose Ha-gelili said one thing and R. Jose b. Halaftha disagreed with the three of them.²²

This same point of contention arises elsewhere, in a Talmudic dis-

21. Pesikta deRav Kahana 6:1, pp. 113-4; Midrash Tehillim 50:2; Bemidbar Rabbah 21:19; Pesikta Rabbati 16, p. 81b; Kohelet Rabbah 9:11; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 5, section 176, p. 374a. See also Chapter 8, pp. 227f.

22. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10; Sanhedrin 13a; Bemidbar Rabbah 10:4. See also Chapter 12, p. 285.

cussion of marriage to idolators;

R. Joseph /said/: AND SOLOMON BECAME ALLIED TO PHARAOH KING OF EGYPT BY MARRIAGE, AND TOOK PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER (I Kings 3:1) - He caused her to be converted /since otherwise the marriage would not have been valid/.... /But/ R. Papa replied: Solomon did not marry at all, for it is written, OF THE NATIONS CONCERNING WHICH THE LORD SAID UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: "YE SHALL NOT GO AMONG THEM, NEITHER SHALL THEY COME AMONG YOU; FOR SURELY THEY WILL TURN AWAY YOUR HEART AFTER THEIR GODS"; SOLOMON DID CLEAVE UNTO THEM IN LOVE /in love, but not in marriage/ (I Kings 11:2). The expression, AND SOLOMON BECAME ALLIED...IN MARRIAGE, however, presents a difficulty! - On account of his excessive love for /Pharaoh's daughter/, Scripture regards him as if he had become allied by marriage to her.²³

Thus the position of R. Jose b. Halafta and R. Joseph, which credits Solomon with converting his wives, is ultimately rejected. But another midrash attempts to clear Solomon of sin altogether:

R. Samuel b. Nahami said in the name of R. Jonathan: Anyone who says that Solomon sinned is absolutely mistaken; as it is said, HIS HEART WAS NOT WHOLE WITH THE LORD HIS GOD, AS WAS THE HEART OF DAVID HIS FATHER (I Kings 11:4). AS WAS THE HEART OF DAVID HIS FATHER -- he did not sin; likewise /his son/ did not sin. /The rabbis interpret AS WAS to mean that Solomon's heart was just like David's, not in a contrasting sense at all./ How then is one to understand, FOR IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, THAT HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART (*ibid.*)? As did R. Nathan. He pointed out a contradiction of texts. It is written, FOR IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, THAT HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART. But it is also written, AS WAS THE HEART OF DAVID HIS FATHER. Just as David did not sin, so Solomon did not sin. So we are to read, "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart, but he didn't go astray." And we are to understand the verse, THEN DID SOLOMON BUILD A HIGH PLACE FOR CHEMOSH THE DETESTATION

23. Yevamot 76a-b (Soncino, pp. 514-5).

OF MOAB (*ibid.* 7), to mean that he wished to build it, but he didn't. By way of refutation, one could argue that the verse, THEN JOSHUA BUILT AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD (Josh. 8:30), means that he wished to build it but didn't. On the contrary, just as Joshua built his altar, so Solomon must have built his. But it is as R. Jose said in a Baraitha: AND THE HIGH PLACES THAT WERE BEFORE JERUSALEM, WHICH WERE ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MOUNT OF CORRUPTION, WHICH SOLOMON THE KING OF ISRAEL HAD BUILDED FOR ASHTORETH THE DETESTATION OF THE ZIDONIANS, etc. (II Kings 23:13). Is it possible that Asa came along and didn't destroy them, or that Jehoshaphat didn't destroy them, until Josiah came and destroyed them? Rather, didn't Asa and Jehoshaphat eliminate all idolatry in the land of Israel? But those who come first are compared to those who come later. If those who come later fail to do something, it is accounted praiseworthy, while if those who come earlier fail to do it, it is accounted a disgrace. So the verse, AND SOLOMON DID THAT WHICH WAS EVIL IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD (I Kings 11:6) means that because it was his duty to resist his wives, and he didn't resist them, the verse accounts it to him as if he sinned.²⁴

But immediately afterward, the majority view reasserts itself:

R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: It would have been better for that righteous man to have been a servant for idolatry than to have the verse written of him, AND SOLOMON DID THAT WHICH WAS EVIL IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD (I Kings 11:6).²⁵

Solomon did have one righteous wife, Naamah, the Ammonitess.

This midrash testifies to her merit:

ARISE, TAKE THY WIFE, AND THY TWO DAUGHTERS THAT ARE HERE /אִרְאֵה אֶת-נָשֶׁיךָ וְאֶת-בָּתְּרֶיךָ/ (Gen. 19:15). R. Tuviah said in the name of R. Isaac: /The daughters were ancestors of/ two "finds" /מְצִיאוֹת/ --

24. Shabbat 56b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 11, section 176, p. 377a.

25. Shabbat 56b. See above, section I, p. 49.

Ruth the Moabitess and Naamah the Ammonitess.²⁶

But the rabbis hardly emphasized Solomon's relationship to her. This is as good an indication as any that the rabbis saw Solomon's wives as totally bad. Except for the few above examples, the rabbis chose not to fight the clear biblical statements.

An underlying issue here is the matter of intermarriage. Only R. Jose b. Halafta (p. 63) presented a view open to intermarriage, as a means of bringing non-Jews into the faith. He was outnumbered three to one. Solomon's wives, and Pharaoh's daughter in particular, were his greatest sin because they threatened the heart of Judaism. They had the power to turn even the wisest of men away from God. The lesson is clear, as stated in Nehemiah 13:23-31. Pharaoh's daughter had even succeeded in spoiling the dedication of the Temple! Leading him also into drunkenness and extravagance, his wives were an utter disaster, both to him and to Israel as well.²⁷

26. Bereshit Rabbah 50:15 (16). See also Chapter 3, pp. 104-6.

27. Their only redeeming deed was unknowing -- their testimony exposed Ashmedai as an impostor when he supplanted Solomon on the throne. See Chapter 3, pp. 101 and 103.

As we read in section II, page 57 , Solomon's reign was divided into two distinct phases -- before his sin and after:

Before he sinned, Solomon ruled over the demons, as it is written, I GOT ME MEN-SINGERS AND WOMEN-SINGERS, AND THE DELIGHTS OF THE SONS OF MEN, WOMEN VERY MANY /שָׂרָה רַעֲדָנוֹ/ (Eccl. 2:8). What do the words שָׂרָה וְשָׂרָה mean? That he ruled over male and female demons /שָׂרִים וְשָׂרָה/. But when he sinned, he brought sixty mighty men, and they would guard his bed, as it is written, BEHOLD, IT IS THE LITTER OF SOLOMON; THREESCORE MIGHTY MEN ARE AROUND IT....THEY ALL HANDLE THE SWORD, AND ARE EXPERT IN WAR, etc. (Song 3:7-8).¹

Another version is more explicit, and it also suggests a date for Solomon's fall from grace:

/R. Simeon b. Yohai asked about Song of Songs 3:7-8./ Why did Solomon do this /i.e., surround his bed with armed guards/? BECAUSE OF DREAD IN THE NIGHT (*ibid.* 8). He was afraid of the demons, that they would harm him. R. Simeon b. Yohai said: Before a person sins, others treat him with respect and fear. After he sins, others inspire respect and fear in himBefore Solomon sinned, he ruled over the demons....He built the Temple /with the help/ of Ashmedai. But when he sinned, Ashmedai caused him lots of problems. After he had returned to the throne, he still feared Ashmedai, so he brought sixty mighty men to guard his bed.²

The date is around the time of the completion of the Temple. This accords perfectly with the midrashim dating Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter on the very day of the completion of the Temple (see section II, p. 59). This would then reinforce the notion that his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter was the critical turning point

1. Pesikta deRav Kahana 5:3; Pesikta Rabbati 16:3, p. 69a; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 3:14; Midrash Shir Ha-shirim 3:7 (8); Shemot Rabbah 30:16.

2. Bemidbar Rabbah 11:3. See Chapter 3, pp. 97ff.

in Solomon's life (section II, p. 57).

As this midrash states, Solomon's power declined after he sinned. It was a decline not only in political power,³ but also in spiritual power:

Before Solomon sinned, he relied on his own merit. But after he sinned, he had to rely on the merit of his forebears, as it is written, I /God/ WILL GIVE ONE TRIBE TO THY SON, FOR DAVID MY SERVANT'S SAKE (I Kings 11:13).⁴

The two periods in Solomon's life made him an ambiguous figure for the rabbis, as this midrash makes explicit:

There are three kings who have no share in the world to come -- Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh. R. Judah b. Shalom said: The scholars of the Mishnah tried to change that to four kings, to include Solomon among them. But a heavenly voice went forth and said, TOUCH NOT MINE ANOINTED ONES, AND DO MY PROPHETS NO HARM (Ps. 105:15). Nevertheless, they tried on another occasion to change it. But a fire came down from heaven and consumed their benches. And the heavenly voice again spoke: SHALL /God's/ RECOMPENSE BE AS YOU WILL IT? BECAUSE YOU DETEST SHALL YOU CHOOSE, AND NOT I? HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO SAY? (Job 34:33). If this is so, why did they want to change it? Because it is written of Solomon, NOW KING SOLOMON LOVED MANY FOREIGN WOMEN....AND SOLOMON DID THAT WHICH WAS EVIL IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD (I Kings 11:1, 6).⁵

In the end, Solomon was not included with the evil kings.⁶ We read in Chapter 1 , p. 45 , that his work on the Temple saved

3. See Chapter 3 , pp. 77ff, on Solomon's loss of political power.

4. Kohelet Rabbah 1:2. His wisdom also declined. See Chapter 6, pp. 177f.

5. Tanhuma, Metsora 1 (beginning); Tanhuma Buber, Metsora 1.

6. Bemidbar Rabbah 14:1; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:5 (end); Midrash Mishle 22, p. 93; Sanhedrin 53a; 104b; Pesikta Rabbati 6, pp. 23b-24a.

him. David also intervened on his behalf, as we read in Chapter 9, pp. 250f. And ultimately God forgave Solomon's sins late in his life, which we can conclude from the fact that he composed his three books with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁷

But the very existence of such a midrash, in which the rabbis (or the men of the Great Assembly) wish to exclude Solomon from eternal life, testifies to the gravity of his sins in their eyes. Only such a monumental achievement as the building of the Temple could offset his debits. These two elements in Solomon's life formed the two poles of his character in the rabbinic view. The greatest of good deeds stood opposite the greatest of sins -- he built the Temple, but he also built altars to idols. As noted, Solomon was spectacular in everything he did. His character was thus profoundly problematic for the rabbis, and for the same reason, profoundly interesting.

7. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:6; Seder Olam 15:3, p. 22a. See also Chapter 7, p. 183.

I

The reign of Solomon was in many ways the zenith of the Israelite monarchy. The rabbis embellished its fabulous reputation and sought to fill in the details of its splendor. They also found in it lessons of man's fallibility and the uncertainty of life. In this chapter, we will examine the midrashic treatment of Solomon's rule, especially in terms of his political power.

One midrash informs us that Solomon was still a child when he assumed the throne:

AND IT CAME TO PASS AT THE END OF FORTY YEARS, THAT ABSALOM SAID UNTO THE KING.... FOR THY SERVANT VOWED A VOW, etc. (II Sam. 15:7-8). This was in the thirty-seventh year of David's reign. R. Nehorai said in the name of R. Joshua: AT THE END OF FORTY YEARS means forty years since Israel requested a king, which was the tenth year of the leadership of Samuel the seer. From here one can calculate that Solomon was twelve years old when he became king - AND /God/ SENT BY THE HAND OF NATHAN THE PROPHET, AND HE CALLED /Solomon's/ NAME JEDIDIAH (II Sam. 12:25). /Just after this it says,/ AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER THIS, THAT ABSALOM THE SON OF DAVID HAD A FAIR SISTER (*ibid.* 13:1). /Then it says,/ AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER TWO FULL YEARS, THAT ABSALOM HAD SHEEP-SHEARERS (*ibid.* 23). /And then it says/ SO ABSALOM FLED, AND WENT TO GESHUR, AND WAS THERE THREE YEARS (*ibid.* 38). This makes five years /since Solomon's birth/. AND ABSALOM DWELT TWO FULL YEARS IN JERUSALEM; AND HE SAW NOT THE KING'S FACE (*ibid.* 14:28) -- that makes seven years. /Then it says,/ AND THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE DAYS OF DAVID THREE YEARS (*ibid.* 21:1), which makes ten years. SO WHEN THEY /the census-takers/ HAD GONE TO AND FRO THROUGH ALL THE LAND, THEY CAME TO JERUSALEM AT THE END OF NINE MONTHS AND TWENTY DAYS (*ibid.* 24:8) -- that makes eleven years. And in the last year King David organized the divisions of priests and Levites, and made preparations for the Temple. And it is written, IN THE FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF DAVID THEY

/the officers of the land/ WERE SOUGHT FOR
/signalling David's death/ (I Chron. 26:31).¹

Solomon's reign began, of course, on the day of his father's death, which happened to be Shabbat and also Shavuot.²

Before David's death, he ordered Solomon to be anointed as his successor. The circumstances of the anointing interested the rabbis:

AND HANNAH PRAYED, AND SAID: MY HEART
EXULTETH IN THE LORD, MY HORN IS EXALTED
IN THE LORD (I Sam. 2:1) -- MY HORN IS
EXALTED, and not "my cruse is exalted."
The reigns of David and Solomon, who were
anointed from a horn /I Sam. 16:13 and I
Kings 1:39/, were lengthy; but the reigns
of Saul and Jehu, who were anointed from a
cruse /I Sam. 16:1 and II Kings 9:3/, were
not lengthy.³

Solomon's anointing was unusual in another respect:

A king, the son of a king, need not be
anointed. If you ask why Solomon was
anointed, it was on account of Adonijah's
attempt to assume the throne /I Kings
1:5-53/.⁴

Another aspect of Solomon's designation was unusual, namely,
his riding upon David's mule:

Isi b. Akabiah said: It is forbidden to
ride upon a mule, reasoning from minor to
major. If one is forbidden to weave to-
gether fabrics which one is allowed to
wear together as independent pieces, how
much the more should one be forbidden to
ride upon a beast /corresponding to the
weaving together/ which one is forbidden
to drive yoked with another. But it is
written, THEN ALL THE KING'S SONS AROSE,
AND EVERY MAN GOT HIM UP UPON HIS MULE,

1. Seder Olam 14.

2. See Chapter 6, p. 172, and Chapter 9, pp. 253f.

3. Megillah 14a; Horayot 12a; Keritot 6a; Midrash Shmu'el 14:5;
Vayikra Rabbah 10:8.

4. Horayot 11b; Keritot 5b; Vayikra Rabbah 10:8.

AND FLED (II Sam. 13:29). But one cannot generalize from royalty. It is also written, CAUSE SOLOMON MY SON TO RIDE UPON MINE OWN MULE (I Kings 1:33). This was a unique creature reserved from the six days of Creation.⁵

The dating of Solomon's reign, as with that of all kings, was reckoned beginning from the month of Nissan:

R. Yohanan said: Whence do we know that one reckons their reigns from Nissan? It is said, AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTIETH YEAR AFTER THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WERE COME OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, IN THE FOURTH YEAR OF SOLOMON'S REIGN OVER ISRAEL, IN THE MONTH ZIV, WHICH IS THE SECOND MONTH, THAT HE BEGAN TO BUILD THE HOUSE OF THE LORD (I Kings 6:1). The reign of Solomon is compared to the Exodus from Egypt: just as the Exodus from Egypt was in Nissan, so the reign of Solomon was reckoned from Nissan.⁶

As noted above, Solomon's reign represented the high point of the Israelite monarchy in terms of political hegemony. The rabbis seem to have been fascinated with the contemplation of Israelite dominion, judging from the many midrashim which deal with this issue:

Even before the Holy One, blessed be He, brought Israel out of Egypt, He hinted to them that their sovereignty would last thirty generations, as it is said, THIS MONTH SHALL BE UNTO YOU THE BEGINNING OF MONTHS (Ex. 12:2). The month is thirty days and your sovereignty is thirty generations. In the beginning of the month of Nissan, the moon begins to shine, and it increases in light until the fifteenth day, when its disc is full. Then from the fifteenth day to the thirtieth day, its light decreases, until on the thirtieth day it cannot be seen. So too with Israel:

5. Y. Kil'ayim 31c; T. Kil'ayim 5:6.

6. Rosh Hashanah 2b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 6, section 181, p. 374b.

there were fifteen generations from Abraham to Solomon. Abraham began to shine / **וְאֶבְרָהָם** / as it is said, WHO HATH RAISED UP / **וְיָרָא** / ONE FROM THE EAST (Is. 41:2).⁷ Isaac came and he too gave light, as it is said, LIGHT IS SOWN / **וְיִרְבֵּן** / FOR THE RIGHTEOUS (Ps. 97:11).⁸ Jacob came and added light, as it is said, AND THE LIGHT OF ISRAEL SHALL BE FOR A FIRE (Is. 10:17). Then came Judah, Perez, Hexron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David. When Solomon came, the disc of the moon was full, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING (I Chron. 29:23). But can a mortal indeed sit upon the throne of the Holy One, blessed be He, of Whom it is said, HIS THRONE WAS FIERY FLAMES (Dan. 7:9)? Rather, what this means is that just as the Holy One, blessed be He, rules from one end of the world to the other, and rules over all the kings, as it is said, ALL THE KINGS OF THE EARTH SHALL GIVE THEE THANKS, O LORD (Ps. 138:4), so too did Solomon reign from one end of the world to the other as it is said, AND ALL THE KINGS OF THE EARTH SOUGHT THE PRESENCE OF SOLOMON....AND THEY BROUGHT EVERY MAN HIS PRESENT (II Chron. 9:23-24). That is why it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, is clothed in splendor and majesty, and He gave Solomon the splendor of kingship, as it is said, /The Lord/ BESTOWED UPON /Solomon/... ROYAL MAJESTY (I Chron. 29:25).⁹

Solomon himself created a symbol of his supremacy among the leaders

-
7. The midrash puns on **וְיָרָא** and **וְיִרְבֵּן**. It reads the Isaiah verse, "Who has shone forth (**וְיָרָא**) from the east." On the association of this verse with Abraham, see Chapter 1, p. 34.
 8. **וְיִרְבֵּן** is taken as a reference to Isaac, who was the source of Abraham's **וְיִרְבֵּן** (descendants), as indicated in Gen. 21:12: FOR IN ISAAC SHALL SEED (**וְיִרְבֵּן**) BE CALLED TO THEE.
 9. Shemot Rabbah 15:26; Pesikta Rabbati 15 (Braude, Preamble, pp. 301-2). Another version in Pesikta Rabbati 15, pp. 76a-77b (Braude, p. 232) gives this midrash a moral tone, making Solomon a reflection of Israel's righteousness. See also Chapter 1, section I, where Solomon's reign is pictured as the high point of Creation because he built the Temple.

of Israel:

Why did Moses make seven candles /one menorah/, while Solomon made seventy /ten menorot/? Moses uprooted seven nations from before Israel, but Solomon ruled over seventy nations, as it is said, AND SOLOMON RULED OVER ALL THE KINGDOMS (I Kings 5:1).¹⁰

An artifact from the Tabernacle also symbolized the expanse of Solomon's domain:

The dish and the basin which Nahshon /prince of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of the kings of Judah/ offered /for use in the Tabernacle -- Nu. 7:13/ symbolized the kings of the house of David, who were destined to descend from him /Nahshon/, who ruled over the whole world, ruling the seas and the dry land, for example, Solomon and the Messiah. Of Solomon it is written, FOR HE HAD DOMINION OVER ALL THE REGION ON THIS SIDE THE RIVER, FROM TIPHSAH EVEN TO GAZA (I Kings 5:4). Rav and Samuel had somewhat different interpretations. One said: Tiphseh is at one end of the world and Gaza is at the other end. And the other said: The two places stood next to each other, and just as he ruled over Tiphseh and Gaza, so he ruled over the whole world. The text also says, AND ALL THE EARTH SOUGHT THE PRESENCE OF SOLOMON, TO HEAR HIS WISDOM....AND THEY BROUGHT EVERY MAN HIS PRESENT (I Kings 10:24-25). How do we know that he ruled the seas? It is written, AND THE NAVY ALSO OF HIRAM, THAT BROUGHT GOLD FROM OPHIR, etc. (*ibid.* 11), and FOR THE KING HAD AT SEA A NAVY OF TARSHISH WITH THE NAVY OF HIRAM; ONCE EVERY THREE YEARS CAME THE NAVY OF TARSHISH, etc. (*ibid.* 22). And it also says, I WILL SET HIS /David's, and by extension, his royal descendants'/ HAND ALSO ON THE SEA, AND HIS RIGHT HAND ON THE RIVERS (Ps. 89:26)....So /Nahshon/ offered the dish as a symbol of the sea, which encircles the whole world and resembles a dish....ONE SILVER BASIN /כֶּסֶף/ (Nu. 7:13) -- /Nahshon offered this/ as a symbol of the world, which is made as is a ball, which is tossed /כֶּסֶף/ from hand to hand. Why was its weight SEVENTY SHEKELS (*ibid.*)? Because the two

10. Yalkut Shim'oni, Beha'alotcha 8, p. 235a.

of them /Solomon and the Messiah/ ruled over the seventy nations, from one end of the world to the other.¹¹

Another of Nahshon's offerings also symbolized the complete dominion of Solomon:

AND FOR THE SACRIFICE OF PEACE-OFFERINGS, TWO OXEN /בקר/ (Nu. 7:17) -- this refers to David and Solomon, who began the kingship. For בקר can only refer to kingship, as it is said, CURD OF KINE /בקר/, AND MILK OF SHEEP (Deut. 32:14), which we translate, "God gave them the booty of their kings." שָׁלוֹם /peace-offerings/ signifies that they were completely righteous /שְׁלֵמִים = שָׁלוֹם, complete/ and that in their days the Israelites were living in peace /שָׁלוֹם/. And in the days of Solomon the kingdom was complete /שָׁלוֹם/, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23).¹²

But Solomon and the Messiah were not the only so-called Cosmocrats, kings over the whole world. There are several lists of such kings.

Here is the lengthiest such list:

Ten kings ruled from one end of the world to the other. The first King is the Holy One, blessed be He....The second king is Nimrod.... The third king is Joseph....The fourth king is Solomon....The fifth king is Ahab....The sixth king is Nebuchadnezzar....The seventh king is Cyrus....The eighth king is Alexander of Macedonia....The ninth king is the Messiah.... For the tenth, the kingship will return to its Owner; the One who was the first King, He is the last King.¹³

Other lists include Ahasuerus, ¹⁴ Darius, ¹⁵ Joshua,¹⁶

-
11. Bemidbar Rabbah 13:14.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer 11, pp. 28a (bottom) - 29a. For each king the midrash gives a prooftext.
 14. Aggadat Esther 1, p. 4b; Esther Rabbah 1:5.
 15. Esther Rabbah 1:5.
 16. Vayikra Rabbah 36:2.

David,¹⁷ and the Greek empire.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Solomon stood out as the archetypal cosmocrat in Jewish history:

Just as God raised up kings and sages and prophets for Israel, so did He raise them up for idolators. He raised up King Solomon over Israel and all the world, and He did likewise for Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹

Indeed, Solomon was the prime example of the divine right of kings:

WHO IS THE KING OF GLORY? (Ps. 24:10). Why is the Holy One, blessed be He, here called "the King of glory"? Because He apportions glory to those that fear Him. How do we know? A mortal king allows no one to ride upon his horse or to sit upon his throne. But the Holy One, blessed be He, caused Solomon to sit upon his throne, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING (I Chron. 29:23).²⁰

Solomon must have done something right to have deserved such singular preeminence, the rabbis reasoned. And they found the answer:

Solomon said, "David my father said before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Lord of all worlds, CREATE ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD' (Ps. 51:12). He made an improper request. When he realized that he had done so, he corrected himself and said, 'WASH ME FROM MINE INIQUITY, AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN' (*ibid.* 4). What did the Holy Spirit say to him? It said, 'David, since you have humbled yourself in your request, I give you a pure heart.' Indeed, the Holy Spirit said about him, 'THE LORD HATH SOUGHT HIM A MAN AFTER HIS OWN HEART' (I Sam. 13:14)." When Solomon saw that David had humbled himself, he said likewise, WHO CAN SAY: "I HAVE MADE MY HEART CLEAN, I AM PURE FROM

17. *Ibid.*; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:6.

18. Aggadat Esther 1, p. 4b.

19. Bemidbar Rabbah 20:1. See also Chapter 1, p. 7.

20. Shemot Rabbah 8:1; Tanhuma, Va'era 8; Tanhuma Buber, Va'era 7.

MY SIN"? (Prov. 29:9). What reward did he receive for this? THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING (I Chron. 29:23). /Then follows the midrash about Tiphshah and Gaza, explaining that Solomon ruled the whole world./ R. Jose Ha-gelili said: Why did Solomon deserve all this? Because he didn't exalt himself before the Holy One, blessed be He. Does it not follow logically, that if Solomon, the archetypal master of wisdom and prophecy, humbled himself and so deserved to rule from one end of the earth to the other, how much the more so should everyone else /humble himself before God/. And so said the Sages: Happy is the man who humbles himself and does not exalt himself, for he shall be deserving before the Holy One, blessed be He.²¹

But just as his merit earned him dominion, Solomon's mistakes cost him that same dominion:

Did not Solomon wisely say, WISDOM IS BETTER THAN WEAPONS OF WAR (Eccl. 9:18)? For all the wars which Israel waged when they came into the land of Canaan were not able to subdue the whole world under their power as it was subdued under Solomon through his wisdom. And so it says, FOR HE HAD DOMINION OVER ALL THE REGION ON THIS SIDE THE RIVER, FROM TIPSHAH EVEN TO GAZA (I Kings 5:4). BUT ONE SINNER /or here, "one sin"/ DESTROYETH MUCH GOOD (Eccl. 9:18), as it is said, AND THE LORD WAS ANGRY WITH SOLOMON, BECAUSE HIS HEART WAS TURNED AWAY FROM THE LORD....WHEREFORE THE LORD SAID UNTO SOLOMON, "FORASMUCH AS THIS HATH BEEN IN THY MIND, AND THOU HAST NOT KEPT MY COVENANT AND MY STATUTES....I WILL SURELY REND THE KINGDOM FROM THEE" (I Kings 11:9, 11).²²

This same lesson is implied in a similar midrash which extends Solomon's reign over the extra-terrestrial world as well:

THE MAN SAITH UNTO ITHIEL / לִאֲתִיאל / (Prov. 30:1). This means that Solomon /understood as the author and the referent of לִאֲתִיאל/ understood

21. Midrash Mishle 20:9.

22. Pesikta Zutreta, Behar Sinai (beginning).

the letters of God / **לֹא הָיָה לְיָדָיו**/. AND UCAL / **לֹא הָיָה לְיָדָיו**/ (ibid.) means that he was able / **לֹא הָיָה לְיָדָיו**/ to stand up to them /that is, to the power of the divine letters/. And how do we know? Because he ruled over the upper world and the lower world, as it is said, FOR HE HAD DOMINION OVER ALL THE REGION ON THIS SIDE THE RIVER, FROM TIPHSAH EVEN TO GAZA (I Kings 5:4). But after alluding to all his dominion and wisdom and glory, he had to say, SURELY I AM BRUTISH, UNLIKE A MAN /**אִנִּי כְּאָדָם**/, perhaps understood here as "I am more brutish than a man"/ (Prov. 30:2). This refers to Noah who is called **אָדָם**, as it is said, NOAH WAS IN HIS GENERATIONS A MAN /**אָדָם**/ RIGHTEOUS AND WHOLE-HEARTED (Gen. 6:9). Solomon said, "I should have learned from Noah, who became drunk with wine and was punished for it...." AND I HAVE NOT THE UNDERSTANDING OF A MAN /**אִנִּי כְּאָדָם**/ (Prov. 30:2). This refers to Adam /**אָדָם**/. /Solomon said, "I should have learned from Adam, / who had only one wife, and she misled him. I had a thousand wives...and it is said of me, HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART (I Kings 11:4)."23

Following his sin or sins, Solomon lost power in stages:

Resh Lakish said: At first Solomon reigned over the upper world /as well as the lower/, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23). Then he ruled only over the lower world, as it is said, FOR HE HAD DOMINION OVER ALL THE REGION ON THIS SIDE THE RIVER, FROM TIPHSAH EVEN TO GAZA (I Kings 5:4). /Then comes the passage in which Rav and Samuel interpret this verse./ Then he ruled only over Israel, as it is said, I KOHELET HAVE BEEN KING OVER ISRAEL (Eccl. 1:12). Then he ruled only over Jerusalem, as it is said, THE WORDS OF KOHELET, THE SON OF DAVID, KING IN JERUSALEM (Eccl. 1:1). Then he ruled only over his own bed, as it is said, BEHOLD, IT IS THE LITTER OF SOLOMON; THREESCORE MIGHTY MEN ARE ABOUT IT (Song 3:7). And finally he ruled only over his own walking stick, as it is said, AND THIS WAS MY PORTION FROM ALL MY LABOUR (Eccl. 2:10). Rav and Samuel gave different interpretations. One said that it was his walking stick and the other said it was his overalls. Did he or did he not regain his throne? One said that he did and one said he

23. Midrash Mishle 30:1-2. This and many of the following midrashim can also be found in Chapter 2 , which deals with Solomon's sins.

did not. He who said that he did not regain it said Solomon was first a king, then a commoner. And he who maintained that he did regain his throne said that Solomon was first a king, then a commoner, and then a king once more.

This disagreement between Rav and Samuel figures also in the following midrash. This is actually another list of the cosmocrats:

Our Rabbis taught: Three /potentates/ ruled over the whole globe, namely, Ahab, Ahasuerus and Nebuchadnezzar....But are there no more? Is there not Solomon? He did not retain his kingdom /till his death/. This is a sufficient answer for the one who holds that he was first a king and then a subject. But for the one who holds that he was first a king, then a subject, and then a king again, what can we reply? Solomon was in a different category, because he ruled over the denizens of the upper world as well as of the lower, as it says, AND SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23).²⁵

Another midrash pictures Solomon's political career as a rise and fall, both in three stages:

You find that all of Solomon's activities were threefold. He ascended in three stages. Of the first stage it is written, FOR HE HAD DOMINION OVER ALL THE REGIONS ON THIS SIDE THE RIVER (I Kings 5:4). Of the second stage it is written, AND SOLOMON RULED OVER ALL THE KINGDOMS, etc. (ibid. 1). Of the third stage it is written, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING (I Chron. 29:23) /meaning that he ruled over the whole world/. Solomon descended in three stages. The first descent: After he had been a mighty king from one end of the world to the other, his dominion was diminished so that he ruled only over Israrl, as it is written, THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON THE SON OF DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL (Prov. 1:1). The second descent: After he had been king over Israel, his dominion was diminished so that he ruled only over Jerusalem, as it is written, I KOHELET HAVE BEEN KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM

24. Sanhedrin 20b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 5, section 177, p. 374a; Gittin 68b.

25. Megillah 11a-b (Soncino, p. 64).

(Eccl. 1:12). The third descent: After he had been king over Jerusalem, his dominion was diminished so that he ruled only over his own house, as it is said, BEHOLD, IT IS THE LITTER OF SOLOMON; THREESCORE MIGHTY MEN ARE ABOUT IT...THEY ALL HANDLE THE SWORD (Song 3:7-8). So even over his own bed he did not rule, because he was afraid of the demons.²⁶ So he experienced three stations in life. R. Yudan and R. Honia differed. R. Yudan said: He was first king, then commoner, then king again; first wise, then foolish, then wise again; first wealthy, then poor, then wealthy again. What basis do we have for this conclusion? ALL THINGS HAVE I SEEN IN THE DAYS OF MY VANITY (Eccl. 7:15). A person doesn't speak of his troubles until he is prosperous again. R. Honia said: He was first a commoner, then king, then commoner again; first poor, then wealthy, then poor again. How do we know? I KOHELET WAS KING OVER ISRAEL (Eccl. 1:12). "Once I was, but now I am not."²⁷

One midrash suggests a date for the beginning of Solomon's difficulties:

AND SOLOMON LOVED THE LORD, WALKING IN THE STATUTES OF DAVID HIS FATHER (I Kings 3:3). He did so for four years until he began to build the Temple. But at the same time as he began the Temple, Solomon TOOK PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER, AND BROUGHT HER INTO THE CITY OF DAVID (*ibid.* 1). So later in the same section we read, AND WHEN HADAD HEARD IN EGYPT, etc., and, AND /Rezon/ WAS AN ADVERSARY TO ISRAEL ALL THE DAYS OF SOLOMON (*ibid.* 11:21, 25).²⁸

Other midrashim see Solomon's downfall as sudden, not gradual:

/As punishment for violating the prohibitions

-
26. Solomon's dealing with the demons are discussed in the following section.
 27. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10; Midrash Zuta, Shir Ha-shirim p. 5; Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 6. The latter two sources add that the people of Jerusalem rebelled against Solomon, bringing on his third descent. Also, the first two ascents deal with his wealth and his wisdom, respectively, rather than with his dominion alone.
 28. Seder Olam 15, p. 43. The appearance of these two adversaries was only one of the many disastrous consequences of Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. See Chapter 2, pp. 57-62.

of Deut. 17:16-17,/ the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Solomon, "What is this crown doing in your hand? Get off my throne!" At the same moment an angel in Solomon's likeness descended and sat upon his throne, and Solomon wandered among all the synagogues and houses of study in Jerusalem, saying to them, I KOHELET WAS KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM (Ecc1. 1:12). And they said to him, "King Solomon is sitting on his throne and you go around saying, 'I am King Solomon'!" Then they would tap him with a length of reed /which was done to quiet a mad man/ and give him a dish of boiled grits. At that moment, he said, VANITY OF VANITIES, SAITH KOHELET (Ecc1. 1:2).²⁹

Another source says that after being deposed, Solomon was fed boiled grits each day by an angel.³⁰ But the most pathetic picture of his humiliation is painted in the following midrash:

BETTER IS A DINNER OF HERBS WHERE LOVE IS, THAN A STALLED OX AND HATRED THEREWITH (Prov. 15:17). R. Levi said: About whom did Solomon say this verse? About two people whom he encountered while he was deposed and was wandering from door to door in search of sustenance. He met two people who recognized him. The first came and prostrated himself before Solomon and said to him, "My lord the king, if it is your desire, take a meal with me today." So Solomon went with him, and he took him up to the upper storey, and slaughtered an ox, and had many delicacies brought before him. Then he started to recount to Solomon the events of his reign, and said, "Remember when you did such and such on such and such a day when you were king?" As soon as he reminded him of the days of his reign, Solomon began to weep and wail. So it went throughout the whole meal until Solomon got up from it, sated from his weeping. The next day he encountered the first man's friend,

29. Pesikta deRav Kahana 26:2; Tanhuma, Aharei Mot. 1, p. 26; Tanhuma Buber, Aharei Mot 2; Kohelet Rabbah 2:3; Ruth Rabbah 5:6. Zohar, Bereshit 250a (Soncino II, p. 390), has an esoteric variation on this midrash.

30. Tanhuma, Va'ethanan 2.

who prostrated himself before Solomon and said to him, "My lord the king, if it is your desire, take a meal with me today." Solomon replied, "Not if you try to do for me what your friend did yesterday." The man said, "My lord the king, I am a poor man, but if you wish, share with me today the few herbs which I have." So Solomon went home with him. The man washed Solomon's hands and feet, and brought some small portion of herbs. Then the man began to console Solomon, saying to him, "My lord the king, the Holy One, blessed be He, swore an oath to your father that He would not take the throne from his descendants, as it is said, THE LORD SWORE UNTO DAVID IN TRUTH; HE WILL NOT TURN BACK FROM IT: 'OF THE FRUIT OF THY BODY WILL I SET UPON THY THRONE' (Ps. 132:11). But it is the way of the Holy One, blessed be He, to chastise and to chastise again, as it is said, FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVETH HE CORRECTETH, EVEN AS A FATHER THE SON IN WHOM HE DELIGHTETH (Prov. 3:12). But the Holy One, blessed be He, will restore you to your throne." As soon as Solomon heard that, his mind was relieved, and he rejoiced in that meal of herbs, and rose from it satisfied. R. Hiyya bar Abba in the name of R. Abun bar Benjamin in the name of R. Jose b. Zimra said: When Solomon regained his throne, he wrote in his wisdom, "BETTER IS A DINNER OF HERBS WHERE LOVE IS, which was when I ate with the poor man, THAN A STALLED OX AND HATRED THEREWITH, which was when that rich man fed me and reminded me of all my sorrow."³¹

According to the next midrash, Solomon's exile from the throne lasted for only thirty-six days:

"Son" / בן / was one of Solomon's names.... The Holy One, blessed be He, called him "son", as it is said, I WILL BE TO HIM /Solomon/ FOR A FATHER, AND HE SHALL BE TO ME FOR A SON; IF HE COMMIT INIQUITY, I WILL CHASTEN HIM WITH THE ROD OF MEN (II Sam. 7:14). When did He chasten him? When he removed him from the throne. From this it was said that Solomon was dethroned for thirty-six days. How do we know it was thirty-six days? We can derive

31. Midrash Mishle 15:17; Yalkut Shim'oni, Prov. 15, section 953, pp. 494a-b.

it from the amount of time that Solomon reigned. It is said, AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTIETH YEAR AFTER THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WERE COME OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, IN THE FOURTH YEAR OF SOLOMON'S REIGN OVER ISRAEL, IN THE MONTH ZIV, WHICH IS THE SECOND MONTH, THAT HE BEGAN TO BUILD THE HOUSE OF THE LORD (I Kings 6:1). This verse talks both of past and present. /Although it actually reads *והיה בשנת הרביעית* "the second month of Solomon's reign"/, it doesn't mean that. Rather, it means IN THE FOURTH YEAR OF SOLOMON'S REIGN. The /parenthetical reference to the/ second month refers to the beginning of Solomon's reign. Now Rehoboam /Solomon's son and successor/ began to reign somewhat before Shavuot³² /which falls on the sixth day of Sivan, the third month/. So between /the beginning of the second month, the beginning of Solomon's reign, and the sixth of the third month, the latest possible beginning of Rehoboam's reign/, there are thirty-six days.³³ Now it is written, AND THE TIME THAT SOLOMON REIGNED... WAS FORTY YEARS (I Kings 11:42). Why are the additional thirty-six days not mentioned?³⁴ This teaches that for thirty-six days he was as a commoner.³⁵

Another midrash, however, says that Solomon's exile from rule lasted for three years (see below, section II, p.101). These last two midrashim agree with the view that Solomon was first king, then commoner, then king again. All of these midrashim about Solomon's downfall are lessons in the uncertainty of life and the fallibility of

-
32. *בפרט העצרת*, which, according M. Shekalim 3:1, means at least fifteen days before Shavuot. This confuses the calculation considerably!
33. Actually, there are only thirty-five days, since Iyar, the second month, has only twenty-nine days. This further confuses the calculation.
34. Since Rehoboam began to reign around the sixth of Sivan, Solomon must have ruled for forty years (from the beginning of one Iyar to the beginning of another forty years later) plus thirty-six more days beyond the beginning of that last Iyar. These extra thirty-six days are not mentioned in the Bible.
35. Mishnat R. Eliezer 5 (beginning).

man. The most powerful king in history, whom God favored with power because of his humility and his wisdom, was brought to a state of humiliation because of the errors of his pride.

Two other midrashim deal with another aspect of Solomon's reign, namely, the burden of leadership in general:

AND I TURNED MYSELF TO BEHOLD WISDOM AND MADNESS AND FOLLY (Eccl. 2:12)....R. Hanina bar Papa said: MADNESS refers to the madness of leadership, and FOLLY refers to the annoyances /of leadership/.³⁶

/"Love work/ and hate mystery" /Avot 1:10/. Hate mystery because mastery buries its owners and a touch of kingship is heavy. So it says, AND JOSEPH DIED, AND ALL HIS BRETHREN (Ex. 1:1) /understood to mean that Joseph died before all his brothers/. But wasn't Joseph the youngest of them all? Yes, but "mastery buries its owners, and a touch of kingship is heavy." So too it says, AND THE PEOPLE SERVED THE LORD ALL THE DAYS OF JOSHUA, AND ALL THE DAYS OF THE ELDERS WHO OUTLIVED JOSHUA (Jud. 2:7). But wasn't Joshua younger than all of them? Yes, but "mastery buries its owners, and a touch of kingship is heavy." So too it says, AND KING REHOBOAM TOOK COUNSEL WITH THE OLD MEN, THAT HAD STOOD BEFORE SOLOMON HIS FATHER WHILE HE YET LIVED (I Kings 12:6). Wasn't Solomon younger than all of them? Yes, but "mastery buries its owners, and a touch of kingship is heavy."³⁷

36. Kohelet Rabbah 2:14. The connection with Solomon is only implied by the assumption that he wrote Ecclesiastes.

37. Avot deRabbi Nathan, Nusha 2, Perek 22.

II

Before he sinned, Solomon ruled over all God's creatures, not only over mankind. This of course included the animal world:

AND THE FEAR OF YOU AND THE DREAD OF YOU
SHALL BE UPON EVERY BEAST OF THE EARTH,
AND UPON EVERY FOWL OF THE AIR, AND UPON
ALL WHEREWITH THE GROUND TEENETH, AND
UPON ALL THE FISHES OF THE SEA: INTO
YOUR HAND ARE THEY DELIVERED (Gen. 9:2).
So fear and dread of man among animals
was restored. But man's dominion over
the animals /Gen. 1:26, 28/ was not re-
stored /in Noah's time/. When was it re-
stored? In the days of Solomon, FOR HE
HAD DOMINION OVER ALL THE REGION ON THIS
SIDE THE RIVER, etc. (I Kings 5:4).¹

Especially useful was his command over eagles. From the beginning he had it, for some say that when David died, Solomon summoned eagles to spread their wings over David's body to shield it from the sun.² Solomon rode upon an eagle when he traveled to the land of Tadmor.³ And some say that it was the eagle who brought Solomon the Shamir for use in building the Temple.⁴

But Solomon's reign extended even to the upper world, that is, to the world of the spirits. This section will deal chiefly with that aspect of Solomon's reign. The following legend gives us a vivid picture of Solomon's power over the spirits, and all other creatures, at the height of his reign:

This is what happened in the days of King Solomon, peace upon him, when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the kingship to Solomon son of David. He caused him to reign over

1. Bereshit Rabbah 34:12. See also Chapter 12, pp. 285f.

2. Ruth Rabbah 3:2.

3. Kohelet Rabbah 2:27. See also below, p. 95.

4. Midrash Tehillim 78:11. See also Chapter 1, p. 12.

every kind of beast and creature in the world, and over mankind, and over all birds, and over all that the Holy One, blessed be He, had created. And He gave him a great mantle upon which he sat /as he flew through the air/, and which was made of green silk woven together with fine gold and every kind of design in the world; it was sixty miles long and sixty miles wide. And Solomon had four ministers: the first from mankind, the second from the spirits, the third from the beasts and the fourth from the birds. The minister from mankind was named Asaph son of Berechiah. The minister from the spirits was named Ramirat. The minister from the beasts was the Lion. The minister from the birds was the Eagle. Solomon traveled upon the winds, so he could eat breakfast in Damascus and supper in Media, that is to say, in the east and in the west. It happened one day that he grew arrogant and said, "There is none like me in the world, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has given me wisdom and understanding and knowledge and insight and has caused me to rule over all His creatures." At that instant the wind shifted and forty thousand men fell off of the mantle /upon which he must have been riding at the time/. When Solomon saw this he cried out to the wind and said, "Return, Wind, be still, Wind." The wind replied, "You return to your God, and do not become arrogant, and I will return to you." At that moment Solomon was shamed by the words of the wind. Another day Solomon was out traveling and he flew over a valley where there were some ants. He heard one of the black ants saying to the others, "Get inside your homes, lest the armies of King Solomon destroy you." When Solomon heard the words of the ant, he became angry and said to the wind, "Go down to the ground," and it went down. He sent to the ants and said, "Which one of you said, 'Get inside your homes, lest the armies of Solomon destroy you'?" That ant said, "I said that to them." He said, "Why did you say that?" It replied, "I feared that your hosts would come to look and would interrupt their praises of the Holy One, blessed be He, Who would then become angry at us and kill us." He said to it, "/In that case/, why did you alone among all these ants speak up?" And it replied, "I am their queen." He said to it, "What is your name?" It told him, "Mahshamah." He said to it, "I would like to ask you a

question." It replied, "It is not proper for the asker to be above and the asked to be below." So he lifted it up in front of him. It then said to him, "It is not proper for the asker to sit upon his seat while the asked is upon the ground. Lift me up beside you and I will give you a reply." So he took it up beside him, and he faced it. Then it said, "Ask." He said to it, "Is there anyone in the world greater than I?" "Yes," it replied. "Who is it?" he asked. "I," it answered. He said, "How are you greater than I?" It replied, "If I were not greater than you, the Holy One, blessed be He, would not have sent you to me to take me up in your hand." When Solomon heard that, he became angry and flung the ant onto the ground and said to it, "Ant, you don't know who I am. I am Solomon the son of King David, peace upon him." It replied, "Remember that you come from a putrid drop and do not become so arrogant." At that moment Solomon fell upon his face and was ashamed and humiliated by the words of the ant. Then he said to the wind, "Lift up the mantle. Let's go." The wind lifted up the mantle, and the ant said to Solomon, "Go, but do not forget the Lord, may He be praised, and become so arrogant." The wind rose high up between heaven and earth and remained there for ten days and ten nights. One day Solomon saw a high vestibule built all of gold. Solomon said to his ministers, "I have never seen a vestibule like that in all the world." Then Solomon said to the wind, "Go down below." The wind went down. Then Solomon and his minister Asaph ben Berechiah went and walked around the vestibule. There was a fragrance of vegetation like the fragrance of the Garden of Eden. But they could find no door by which to enter it, so they wondered how one could get inside. While they pondered this matter, the minister of the spirits came to the king and said to him, "My lord, why are you so worried?" Solomon replied, "I am troubled by this vestibule which has no entrance. I don't know how to get inside." The minister of the spirits said, "My lord the king, I will order the spirits to go up over the roof of the vestibule. Perhaps they will find something -- some person or some bird or some creature." So he called to the spirits and said, "Quickly, go up onto the roof and look around to find something." They went up and

came down again and said, "Our lord, we saw nothing there, no person, but only one great bird, whose name is Eagle, sitting over its chicks." So Solomon summoned the minister of birds and said to it, "Go and bring me the eagle." The vulture went and brought the eagle before King Solomon, peace upon him. The eagle broke forth into songs and praise before the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. And it brought greetings of peace to King Solomon. Solomon said to it, "What is your name?" "El'anad," it replied. He asked it, "How old are you?" "Seven hundred years old," it answered. He asked it, "Have you seen or known or heard that there is an entrance to this house?" It answered, "My lord, by your life, I do not know. But I have a brother who is two hundred years older than I. He knows and understands. He dwells in the second heaven." Solomon said to the vulture, "Return this one to its place and bring me its older brother." It disappeared from view. After an hour it came before Solomon with an eagle older than the first one. It uttered songs and praises to its Creator and brought greetings of peace to King Solomon and stood between his hands. Solomon asked it, "What is your name?" "El'of" it replied. "How many are the years of your life?" he asked. "Nine hundred years," it answered. He asked it, "Do you know or have you heard that there is an entrance to this vestibule?" He replied, "My lord, by your life, I do not know. But I have a brother four hundred years older than I. He knows and understands. He dwells in the third heaven." Solomon said to the minister of the birds, "Take this one back, and bring me its older brother." It took it and disappeared from view. An hour later the older eagle came. It was extremely old and could not fly. The other birds carried it on their wings and brought it before Solomon. It offered glory and praise before its Creator and gave the king greetings of peace. Solomon asked it, "What is your name?" "Elta'amar," it replied. "How old are you?" he asked. "Thirteen hundred years old," it replied. He asked it, "Do you know or have you heard that this vestibule has an entrance?" It answered, "My lord, by your life I do not know. But my father told me that there is an entrance on the western side, which the dust of many years

has covered over. If you wish, command the wind to remove the dust from around the house and the entrance will be revealed." Solomon ordered the wind, and it blew and removed the dust from around the house and the entrance was revealed. The entrance was very big, made of iron, and left as if burned and worn out from age. On the door they saw a lock, on which was written, "Know, you people, that we lived in this vestibule in prosperity and pleasure for many years. When famine came upon us, we ground up our jewels in place of wheat, but it did no good. So we left the house to the eagles, and we lay upon the ground. We said to them, 'To anyone who asks about this vestibule, tell them that you found it already built.'" This also was written there: "No one shall enter this house unless he is a prophet or a king. And if he should wish to enter, he should dig on the right side of the entrance, and he will see a chest (that is, a glass ark)." Solomon broke it and found in it keys. He then opened the entrance and found a gate of gold. He opened it and went inside and he found another gate. He opened that and went inside, and he found a third gate. He opened that and went inside and he saw an extremely beautiful building. In it there was a heap of rubies and topaz and emeralds and jewels. He saw inside the building a chamber with every kind of jewel, and he saw many, many rooms and lovely courtyards paved with bricks -- one of silver and one of gold. He looked at the ground and saw the shape of a scorpion. He removed the scorpion, which was silver, and he found a house under the ground. He opened it, and inside were many kinds of jewels beyond counting and many kinds of gold and silver. He found another opening with a lock upon it. On the door was written, "The former master of this vestibule lived in honor and strength. Beware of the lions and bears of his kingdom and of India. He dwelled in this vestibule in prosperity and pleasure and reigned and sat upon his throne. But his time to die came prematurely. He died and the crown fell from his head. Enter the vestibule and look in wonder." Afterwards he opened the door and entered and saw a third entrance. Upon it was written, "They lived in great honor and wealth. The wealth remains but they died and are gone. The troubles of the time

came upon them, and they went to their graves. No footprint of theirs is left on earth." Then he opened the entrance and found a heap of rubies and topaz and emeralds, upon which was written, "How much I have endured, how much I have experienced, how much I have eaten, how much I have drunk, how much I have worn beautiful clothes, how much I have terrorized and how much I have been terrorized." He went farther and found a beautiful apartment of topaz and emeralds, with three entrances. On the first entrance was written, "Child of Adam, let time not deceive you. You will grow old, you will go from your place and lie beneath the ground." On the second entrance was written, "Do not hurry; little by little for you; for the world shall be given from one to another." And on the third entrance was written, "Take with you provisions for the journey, and prepare food for yourself while it is still day, for you will not remain on earth, nor will you know the day of your death." He opened the door and entered and saw a sitting figure. One who saw it would think that it was alive. He went toward it and approached it, and it shook and cried out in a loud voice, "Come, children of the devils! See, Solomon has come to destroy you!" And fire and smoke issued forth from its eyes. At that instant a great and bitter cry and noise and roar broke out among the demons. Solomon cried out and said to them, "You would terrorize me!? Do you not know that I am King Solomon, ruler over every creature which the Holy One, blessed be He, has created! I want to punish you with every sort of affliction because you have rebelled against me!" Then he pronounced upon them the Divine Name. Instantly they all fell silent. Not one of them could speak. All of the graven images fell upon their faces and the children of the devils fled and hurled themselves into the Great Sea rather than fall into Solomon's hands. Solomon approached the figure and took a silver plate and chain from its throat. Written on the plate were all the details of the vestibule. But he didn't know how to read it. He was deeply troubled, so he said to his ministers, "You know how I have labored, and how I drew near the figure. Now I have taken the plate and I don't know what's written on it." He considered it and said, "What shall I do?" Then he looked and here came a young man out of the wilderness. He came before Solomon

and bowed down to him and said, "What is troubling you, King Solomon?" He told him, "I am troubled by this tablet. I don't know what's written on it." The young man said to him, "Give it to me and I will read it to you. I was sitting in my place, but the Lord, may He be praised, saw that you were troubled. So He sent me to read this writing for you." Solomon gave it to him. He looked at it and remained silent for an hour. Then he wept and said, "Woe, Solomon. This writing is in Greek. It says: 'I, Shadad the son of Aad ruled over a thousand thousand lands and rode upon a thousand thousand horses. Under my hand were a thousand thousand kings, and I killed a thousand thousand mighty men. But when the Angel of Death came to me, I could not withstand him.' And it is written, 'To all who read this: Weary not yourself greatly in this world, for the end of every person is to die, and nothing will remain in a person's hand except a good name.' And this is what came upon Solomon's head in this world."⁵

Despite the obvious lessons in humility which this legend intends to teach, we see Solomon's control over all creatures, and even over the wind, a natural element. The episode with the sitting figure suggests another motif with regard to the spirits, namely, that Solomon ruled over them only by force. There is, however, a contrary motif which suggests that the spirits co-operated willingly with Solomon, as in the earlier sections of this midrash.

These contrary motifs appear in midrashim about the building of the Temple (see Chapter 1, section II). The spirits assisted Solomon in its building. In many cases, the midrashim suggest that they did so willingly, being eager to assist in the building of God's house.⁶ In

5. Beit Ha-midrash V, pp. 22-26.

6. See, for example, Bemidbar Rabbah 14:3, or Midrash Tehillim 24:10.

other cases, however, the spirits are portrayed as enslaved.⁷ The clearest example is the story of how Benaiahu captured Ashmedai in chains in order to gain the Shamir (see below, pp. 97ff, and also Chapter 1, pp. 10ff).

Solomon also used demons for his other public works:

I MADE ME GARDENS AND PARKS (Eccl. 2:5) -- this is to be taken literally; AND I PLANTED TREES IN THEM OF ALL KINDS OF FRUIT (*ibid.*) -- even peppers. R. Abba bar Kahana said: Solomon would use demons, sending them to India to bring him water from there to water the peppers here, and they would bear fruit.⁸

I GOT ME MEN-SINGERS AND WOMEN-SINGERS (Eccl. 2:8) -- the words mean male and female singers. AND THE DELIGHTS OF THE SONS OF MEN (*ibid.*); i.e., public baths and lavatories. WOMEN VERY MANY (*ibid.*), i.e. numerous demonesses to heat them.⁹

Solomon derived another benefit from the spirits, namely, knowledge. Ashmedai played Mephistopheles to Solomon's Faust:

It happened one day in the life of Solomon king of Israel that Ashmedai king of the spirits came in and said to him, "Of you it is written, HE WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN (I Kings 5:11)." Solomon replied, "So the Holy One, blessed be He, promised me." Ashmedai then stuck his hand into the earth and brought out from it a man with two heads and four eyes. Solomon was shaken and terrified, and he said, "Take him inside." Then he summoned Benaiahu ben Jehoiada and said to him, "Tell me, would you say that there are people living beneath us?" He answered, "By your life, my lord the king, I don't know, but I heard from Ahitophel your father's close friend, that there are people living under us." "What would you say if I were to show you one

7. See Masechet Kelim, mishnah 9, which describes the spirits as enslaved to Solomon during the work on the Temple.

8. Kohelet Rabbah 2:7.

9. *Ibid.* 2:10 (Soncino, p. 57); Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 3:14.

of them?" asked Solomon. Benaiah said, "And how could you show it from the depth of the earth, which is a journey of five hundred years, and another five hundred years back again?" Solomon immediately sent and had the man brought forth. When Benaiah saw him, he fell on his face and said, "Who has kept us alive and sustained us to this moment." Solomon asked the man, "Who are you?" He replied, "I am from the people of the generation of Cain." "Where do you live?" asked Solomon. He replied, "In the earth." Solomon asked him, "Do you people have a sun or a moon?" "Yes," he replied, "and we also plough and reap and keep flocks and cattle." "From what direction does your sun shine?" Solomon asked. "From the west, and it sets in the east," he replied. "Do you pray?" Solomon asked. He said yes. "And what is your prayer?" he asked. He said, HOW MANIFOLD ARE THY WORKS, O LORD! IN WISDOM HAST THOU MADE THEM ALL (Ps. 104:24). Solomon said, "If you wish, we will return you to your place." He said to them, "Do as you wish, and return me to my place." So the king summoned Ashmedai and said to him, "Go return him to his place." He replied, "I can never return him to his place." When the man realized that this was the case, he took a wife and with her bore seven sons. Six of them were in the image of the mother, but one was in the image of the father, in that he had two heads. He /the father/ was a farmer and became richer than the richest people in the world. After some time the man died and left an estate to his sons. The six sons said, "There are seven of us among whom to divide our father's money." But the two-headed son said, "There are eight of us, and I am entitled to two parts of the inheritance." They all went to Solomon and said to him, "Our lord the king, we are seven brothers. The two-headed one says we are eight, and he wants to divide our father's money into eight parts, and to take two of the parts." When Solomon heard that, he didn't know what to do. So he summoned the Sanhedrin and said to them, "What do you say about this matter?" They said, "If we say he is one, perhaps he is two?" They fell silent. Solomon said to them, "In the morning I will render a verdict." In the middle of the night, he went into the sanctuary and stood in prayer before God, and said, "Lord of the universe, when You revealed Yourself to me at Gibeon and said to me, ASK WHAT I SHALL GIVE THEE (I Kings 3:5), I requested from You neither silver nor gold, but rather wisdom in order to

judge people in righteousness." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "I shall give you wisdom in the morning." In the morning, Solomon sent and assembled all the Sanhedrin and said to them, "Bring the two-headed man before me." They brought him in before Solomon. Solomon said to them, "Watch closely. If one head knows what I am doing to the other, then he is one person. And if not, then they are two." Then he said, "Bring hot water and old wine and fine linen garments." They brought hot water and placed it before the two-headed man, and Solomon threw the hot water /on one head/ and the old wine /on the other/. He cried out, "My lord the king, we are dying, we are dying /from the pain of the hot water thrown on the one head, experienced by both heads. Both heads also became drunk from the wine./ We are one, not two." "But didn't you tell me, 'We are two'!?" When Israel saw the king's judgment they were amazed and trembled in fear of him. Thus it was said, HE WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN (I Kings 5:11).¹⁰

In the Zohar, there are several references to a book about magic and demons which Ashmedai gave to Solomon.¹¹ But the Zohar also tells of another source from which Solomon learned the secrets of magic:

Solomon said: SO I RETURNED AND CONSIDERED ALL THE OPPRESSION ("oppressed") THAT ARE DONE UNDER THE SUN, AND BEHOLD THE TEARS OF SUCH THAT WERE OPPRESSED AND THEY HAD NO COMFORTER (Ecc1. 4:1).... From whence did he return? Now, we have a tradition that Solomon was wont to rise each day at daybreak and turn his face toward the east, where he saw certain things -- and then toward the south, where he also saw certain things, and finally, to

-
10. Beit Ha-midrash IV, pp. 151-2. The ending is incomplete, and the connection of the fine linen garments is unclear. See the version in Gaster's The Exempla of the Rabbis, #392. For other legends of Solomon's wisdom in judgment, see Chapter 6, section II.
 11. Zohar, Vayikra 19a (Soncino IV, p. 360); 77a (Soncino V, pp. 82-3); Bemidbar 194b (Soncino V, p. 276). Zohar, Shemot 172a (Soncino IV, p. 94), and Bemidbar 193b (Soncino V, p. 274), refer to "the Book of King Solomon" and "the Book of the Wisdom of King Solomon", respectively. This may be the same book. In Legends of the Jews, Vol. 6, p. 369, note 90, Ginzberg identifies Solomon's book on magic with the "Book of Medicine" which Hezekiah is said to have suppressed.

the side of the north. He would stand thus with his head raised and his eyes half-closed until there would come toward him two pillars, one of fire and one of cloud, and borne upon this last an eagle, mighty in stature and strength, his right wing resting upon the fire, and his body and left wing upon the cloud. This eagle bore in his mouth two leaves. The pillar of cloud with the two leaves and the pillar of fire and the eagle upon them, would come and bow before Solomon. Then the eagle would bend down its head a little and give him the leaves. Solomon would take and smell them, and by their odor could discern from whence they came, and recognize one leaf as belonging to him "who has his eyes shut" and the other to him "who has his eyes open"¹²....Now there were a number of things which King Solomon desired that these two beings should make known to him. What did he do? He scaled up his throne with a ring on which was engraved the Holy Name, drew forth from a hidden place another ring on which the Holy Name was also engraved, ascended unto the roof of his palace, seated himself upon the eagle's back, and so departed, attended both by fire and cloud. The eagle ascended into the heavens, and wherever he passed the earth below was darkened. The wiser sort in that part of the earth from whence the light was thus suddenly removed would know the cause and would say, "Assuredly that was King Solomon passing by!" but they knew not whither he went. The vulgar sort, however, would say, "Up there the clouds are moving, and that is why it grew dark so suddenly." The eagle would mount up even to the height of four hundred parasangs, until it reached at length the dark mountain, where is Tarmud in the wilderness; and there at last it would descend. Solomon would then lift up his head and see the dark mountain, and would learn therefrom all that it could teach him and also perceive that it was necessary to penetrate further; after which he would mount once more the back of the eagle and fly on as before until they entered into the depths of the mountains, in the midst of which grew an olive tree. When he was arrived at this spot Solomon would cry out with all his might: LORD, THY HAND IS LIFTED UP, THEY SEE NOT (Is. 26:11). Then he would enter into that place until he reached those who abode there, and he would show them his ring, and there he gained

12. See below, p. 96.

all his knowledge of strange sciences (i.e. witchcraft). When they had told him all that he required he would fly back to his palace in the same way that he came. Then, as he sat once more on his throne, he would reflect upon all that he had gone through, and would conceive ideas of profound wisdom; and it is in reference to such an occasion that he says, SO I RETURNED AND CONSIDERED ALL THE OPPRESSIONS THAT ARE DONE UNDER THE SUN....¹³

Elsewhere, the Zohar gives the identity of Solomon's teachers and the name of the mountains he visited to learn witchcraft:

Now when God saw that these fallen angels were seducing the world, He bound them in chains of iron to a mountain of darkness. Uzza He bound at the bottom of the mountain and covered his face with darkness because he struggled and resisted /so Uzza is he "who has his eyes shut"/, but Azael, who did not resist, He set by the side of the mountain where a little light penetrated /so Azael is he "who has his eyes open"/. Men who know where they are located seek them out, and they teach them enchantments and sorceries and divinations. These mountains of darkness are called the "mountains of the East", and therefore Balaam said: FROM ARAM HATH BALAK BROUGHT ME...FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF THE EAST (Nu. 23:7), because they both learnt their sorceries there. Now Uzza and Azael used to tell those men who came to them some of the notable things which they knew in former times when they were on high, and to speak about the holy world in which they used to be.¹⁴

The magic ring with the Divine Name engraved on it was the source of Solomon's magical power. As we shall see below (pp.100ff), Solomon needed the ring to hold Ashmedai under his power. He also used the ring in an effort to effect וְיָבִיט:

Solomon endeavoured to bring that "Thousand"
/the Tree of Life/ to the Bride in secret,
by the aid of the mysterious ring whereon

13. Zohar, Shemot 112b-113a (Soncino III, pp. 334-6).

14. Zohar, Bemidbar 208a (Soncino V, p. 312). See also below, p. 104.

is engraved the seal of the supernal wisdom.¹⁵

As discussed in the previous section, Solomon's power diminished after his sins. His loss of control over the spirits was particularly traumatic:

BEHOLD, IT IS THE LITTER OF SOLOMON (Song 3:7). This refers to Solomon himself. It teaches that Solomon ruled over the whole world, but then his dominion was diminished, and he ruled only over Tadmor, as it is said, AND HE BUILT TADMOR IN THE WILDERNESS (II Chron. 8:4). Then he ruled only over Israel. Then he ruled only over /Jerusalem/. Then he ruled only over his own bed. And even in his own bed he could not rest, because of evil spirits.¹⁶

Another version of this midrash emphasizes the power of righteousness and the gravity of sin:

Before Solomon sinned, he ruled over the demons.... But after he had sinned, he appointed SIXTY MIGHTY MEN...OF THE MIGHTY MEN OF ISRAEL (Song 3:7), and set them to guard over his bed...because he was afraid of the demons.¹⁷

As king of the demons, Ashmedai was Solomon's greatest ally when under Solomon's control, and his greatest adversary once freed from that control. The story of their stormy relationship is full of fascinating folk lore:

I GOT ME MEN-SINGERS AND WOMEN-SINGERS, AND THE DELIGHTS OF THE SONS OF MEN /שִׁירֵי וְנָשִׁירֵי/ (Eccl. 2:8)....The Master said: Here /in Babylonia/ they translate שִׁירֵי and נָשִׁירֵי as "male and female demons". For what did Solomon want them? It is written, AND THE HOUSE WHEN

15. Zohar, Shemot 145b (Soncino IV, p. 12).

16. Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 3:8; 1, p. 6; Midrash Zuta, Shir Ha-shirim, p. 5. See also p. 179.

17. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 3:14; Midrash Shir Ha-shirim 3:7-8; Pesikta Rabbati 15, p. 69a; Pesikta deRav Kahana 5:3.

IT WAS IN BUILDING WAS MADE OF STONE MADE READY AT THE QUARRY; AND THERE WAS NEITHER HAMMER NOR AXE NOR ANY TOOL OF IRON HEARD IN THE HOUSE WHILE IT WAS IN BUILDING (I Kings 6:7). Solomon said to the Rabbis, "How shall I manage /without iron tools?/" They replied, "There is the Shamir which Moses brought for the stones of the ephod." He asked them, "Where is it to be found?" They replied, "Bring a male and a female demon and tie them together; perhaps they knew and will tell you." So he brought a male and female demon and tied them together. They said to him, "We do not know, but perhaps Ashmedai the prince of the demons knows." He said to them, "Where is he?" They answered, "He is in such-and-such a mountain. He has dug a pit there, which he fills with water and covers with a stone, which he then seals with his seal. Every day he goes up to heaven and studies in the Academy of the sky and then he comes down to earth and studies in the Academy of the earth, and then he goes and examines his seal and opens /the pit/ and drinks and then closes it and seals it again and goes away." Solomon thereupon sent thither Benaiah son of Jehoiada, giving him a chain on which was graven the /Divine/ Name and a ring on which was graven the Name and fleeces of wool and bottles of wine. Benaiah went and dug a pit lower down the hill and let the water flow into it and stopped /the hollow/ with the fleeces of wool, and he then dug a pit higher up and poured the wine into it /so that it should flow into Ashmedai's pit/ and then filled up the pits /he had dug/. He then went and sat on a tree. When Ashmedai came he examined the seal, then opened the pit and found it full of wine. He said, "It is written, WINE IS A MOCKER, STRONG DRINK A BRAWLER, AND WHOSOEVER ERRETH THEREBY IS NOT WISE (Prov. 20:1). And it is also written, WHOREDOM AND WINE AND NEW WINE TAKE AWAY THE UNDERSTANDING (Hosea 4:11). I will not drink it." Growing thirsty, however, he could not resist, and he drank till he became drunk, and fell asleep. Benaiah then came down and threw the chain over him and fastened it. When he awoke he began to struggle, whereupon /Benaiah/ said, "The Name of thy Master is upon thee." As /Benaiah/ was bringing him along, /Ashmedai/ came to a palm tree and rubbed against it and down it came. He came to a house

and knocked it down. He came to the hut of a certain widow. She came out and besought him, and he bent down so as not to touch it, thereby breaking a bone. He said, "That bears out the verse, A SOFT TONGUE BREAKETH THE BONE (Prov. 25:15)." He saw a blind man straying from his way and he put him on the right path. He saw a drunken man losing his way and he put him on his path. He saw a wedding procession making its way merrily and he wept. He heard a man say to a shoemaker, "Make me a pair of shoes that will last seven years," and he laughed. He saw a diviner practising divinations and he laughed. When they reached Jerusalem he was not taken to see Solomon for three days. On the first day he asked, "Why does the king not want to see me?" They replied, "Because he has overdrunk himself." So he took a brick and placed it on top of another. When they reported this to Solomon he said to them, "What he meant to tell you was, 'Give him more to drink.'" On the next day he said to them, "Why does the king not want to see me?" They replied, "Because he has over-eaten himself." He thereupon took one brick from off the other and placed it on the ground. When they reported this to Solomon, he said, "He meant to tell you to keep food away from me." After three days /Ashmedai/ went in to see /Solomon/. /Ashmedai/ took a reed and measured four cubits and threw it in front of him saying, "See now, when you die you will have no more than four cubits in this world, yet you are not satisfied till you subdue me too." He replied, "I want nothing of you. What I want is to build the Temple and I require the Shamir." He said, "It is not in my hands, it is in the hands of the Prince of the Sea who gives it only to the woodpecker, to whom he trusts it on oath. What does the bird do with it? He takes it to a mountain where there is no cultivation and puts it on the edge of the rock which thereupon splits, and he then takes seeds from trees and brings them and throws them into the opening and things grow there...." So they found out a woodpecker's nest with young in it, and covered it over with white glass. When the bird came it wanted to get in but could not, so it went and brought the Shamir and placed it on the glass. Benaiah thereupon gave a shout, and it dropped /the Shamir/ and he took it, and the bird went and committed suicide on account of its oath.

Benaiah said to Ashmedai, "Why when you

saw that blind man going out of his way did you put him right?" He replied, "It has been proclaimed of him in heaven that he is a wholly righteous man, and that whoever does him a kindness will be worthy of the future world." "And why when you saw the drunken man going out of his way did you put him right?" He replied, "They have proclaimed concerning him in heaven that he is wholly wicked, and I conferred a boon on him in order that he may consume /here/ his share /in the future, i.e., so that there may remain no share for him to enjoy in the hereafter/." "Why when you saw the wedding procession did you weep?" He said, "The husband will die within thirty days, and she will have to wait for the brother-in-law who is still a child of thirteen years /before he can give her permission to marry again/." "Why, when you heard a man say to the shoemaker, 'Make me shoes to last seven years,' did you laugh?" He replied, "That man has not seven days to live, and he wants shoes for seven years!" "Why when you saw that diviner divining did you laugh?" He said, "He was sitting on a royal treasure: He should have divined what was beneath him."

Solomon kept him with him until he had built the Temple. One day when /Solomon/ was alone with him, he said "It is written, 'God has as it were מַלְאָכָיו and רָשָׁעִים' /a paraphrase of Nu. 24:8/, and we explain that מַלְאָכָיו means the ministering of angels and רָשָׁעִים means the demons. What is your superiority over us?" /Ashmedai/ said to him, "Take the chain off me and give me the ring, and I will show you." So he took the chain off him and gave him the ring. He then swallowed the ring, and placing one wing on the earth and one on the sky he hurled him four hundred parasangs. In reference to that incident Solomon said, WHAT PROFIT IS THERE TO A MAN IN ALL HIS LABOUR WHEREIN HE LABOURETH UNDER THE SUN (Eccl. 1:3).

AND THIS WAS MY PORTION FROM ALL MY LABOUR (Eccl. 2:10). What is referred to by THIS? Rav and Samuel gave different answers, one saying that it meant his staff and the other that it meant his apron.¹⁸ He used to go round begging /after Ashmedai usurped his throne/, saying wherever he went, I KOHELET WAS KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM (Eccl. 1:12). When he came to the Sanhedrin, the Rabbis said, "Let us see, a madman does not stick to one thing only

18. See section I, p. 78.

/i.e., if Solomon were mad, he would show it by other things as well/. What is the meaning of this?" They asked Benaiah, "Does the king send for you?" He replied, "No." They sent to the queens saying, "Does the king visit you?" They sent back word, "Yes, he does." They then sent to them to say, "Examine his leg /because a demon's legs are like those of a cock/. " They sent back to say, "He comes in stockings, and he visits them in the time of their separation and he also calls for Bathsheba his mother /i.e., to have sex with her/. " They then sent for Solomon and gave him the chain and the ring on which the Name was engraved. When he went in, Ashmedai on catching sight of him flew away, but /Solomon/ remained in fear of him. Therefore it is written, BEHOLD IT IS THE LITTER OF SOLOMON, etc. (Song 3:7-8).¹⁹

Here we see clearly the power of the ring with the Divine Name engraved upon it. Variants of the story of Solomon's overthrow emphasize the ring as well, but they also view Solomon's downfall as punishment for his sins:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Ashmedai king of the spirits, "Go to Solomon and take his signet-ring from his hand." Ashmedai assumed Solomon's likeness and sat upon Solomon's throne, and Israel thought that he was Solomon. Meanwhile, Solomon wandered through the towns and villages, saying I KOHELET WAS KING (Eccl. 1:12), for three years, and people would say to each other, "How crazy this fellow is! The king sits on his throne, and this one says, 'I Kohelet was king!'" /After three years/ the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I have fulfilled the judgement on behalf of the 'yod' /which had brought suit against Solomon for violating the prohibitions of Deut. 17:16-17)/." What had Ashmedai been doing during those three years? He had been transgressing with Solomon's wives, until he came to one of them who was menstruating. When she saw him she said to him, "Why have you changed your custom from what it was?" Ashmedai was silent. "You are not Solomon!" she said. Furthermore, he went to Bath-sheba, Solomon's

19. Gittin 68a-b (Soncino, pp. 322-6).

mother, and said to her, "Such-and-such I desire from you." She went immediately to Benaiah and told him, "Solomon my son demanded such-and-such from me!" Benaiah was shocked and tore his clothing and said, "If so, then heaven forbid, this couldn't be Solomon your son, but rather it must be Ashmedai. And that young man who was wandering around saying, 'I am Kohelet,' must be Solomon himself." Immediately he sent and summoned the youth and asked him "My son, who are you?" "I am Solomon the son of David," he replied. He said to him, "My son, how has this happened?" Solomon answered, "One day I was sitting peacefully when along came a storm wind and hurled me away. From that day until now my sense has been taken from me, and so I wandered." Benaiah asked him, "Do you have any proof /that you are really Solomon/?" "Yes," he said, "When I began to reign, my father took one of my hands and placed it in your hand, and my other hand he placed in the hand of Nathan the prophet, and my mother stood and kissed my father's head." When Benaiah had heard his words, he summoned the Sanhedrin and said, "The situation is thus." Then he said to them, "Write the Divine Name and fix it over your hearts." They went and did so and came back to Benaiah and said to him, "We are afraid of the Name engraved over Ashmedai's heart." Benaiah said to them, "Can one Name overcome many Names?" Immediately Benaiah went with them, and he took a sword and dealt Ashmedai a tremendous blow. Then he took the signet-ring from his hand and sought to kill him. But a heavenly voice came forth and said, "Do not harm him, for this is all My doing, because Solomon transgressed what is written in the Torah." Then they restored Solomon to his throne, with his signet-ring on his hand, and he reassumed his own likeness, and regained his beauty. Solomon said, "Of what value is my dominion or my strength? Nothing has availed me. Rather, him who humbles himself, the Holy One, blessed be He, exalts, as it is said, THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART, O GOD, THOU WILT NOT DESPISE (Ps. 51:19)."20

Another version gives a somewhat different account of Solomon's

20. Neveh Shalom, pp. 53-55; Beit Ha-midrash VI, pp. 106-7. This midrash is included also in Chapter 2, pp. 52f.

restoration to the throne, again emphasizing the importance of the magic ring:

At the end of three years /of wandering, after being deposed as punishment/, Solomon found a place to sleep in the home of an old woman. All night long he wept, so she asked him, "Why are you crying?" He said, "I'm ashamed to tell you." "Why?" "Because you will not approve of me." "Even so, tell me." So he told her, "I am Solomon." "How have you fallen from your greatness?" she asked. He said, "Once I was gazing at my ring when along came the demon-Shimdin /Shmadon = Ashmedai/ who snatched it away from me and threw it into the sea." She then told him that on that very same day she had found a large fish and had discovered a ring inside it. "Would you recognize it if you saw it?" she asked. "Yes," he told her. So in the morning she showed it to him. Its brilliance lit up the whole house. When he saw it, he cried out and wept. As soon as he put it on his finger, an angel came and took him and deposited him at the gates of Jerusalem. He immediately sent for Benaiah ben Yehoiada the priest and said to him, "I beg of you, pray for compassion upon me, for I have wandered from door to door for three years, and I am naked. Now go and inform the assembly in which you and I used to sit.... And I will give you proof /that I am really Solomon/. Go to my wives and have them tell you the habits of this king sitting on the throne." Immediately Benaiah went to the Sanhedrin, and they decreed a fast and prayed for compassion for Solomon all day. Afterwards, they went to his wives and asked them, "What are the habits of this king with regards to you?" The wives told them that previously King Solomon would spend one night with each of them. But now he would visit all one thousand of them in the same night. Immediately Benaiah pronounced the Divine Name and chased Ashmedai from the throne, and an angel came and snatched up Solomon and restored him to the throne.²¹

One other version of the story weaves this account of Solomon's

21. Midrash Shir Ha-shirim 3, pp. 29a-30a.

restoration into a legend about his righteous wife Naamah the Ammonitess. We find another version of how Ashmedai managed to get the ring from Solomon, and we are told why Solomon was punished for three years:

King Solomon, peace upon him, used to roam about the heavens every day to hear secrets from the mouth of Aza and Azael. And he had no fear or dread. And all the supernal hosts would bend down and bow before the Holy One, blessed be He, and praise Him for raising up such a king as this over Israel. And they would fulfill his every wish; as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING (I Chron. 29:23). He ruled over the denizens of the upper world as well as over those of the lower world. He commanded and they brought stones and the necessities for the building of the Temple. And when he sought the Shamir, he brought Ashmedai, the king of the spirits, in chains of iron and by means of a ring upon which was engraved the Divine Name. And Ashmedai remained captive with Solomon for many days, even after the building of the Temple. After Solomon had sinned, Ashmedai asked him to free him so that he could show Solomon a certain secret which was very great and awesome. So he freed him. Then Ashmedai asked him to give him his ring with the Divine Name engraved upon it. Solomon trusted him, for this was the Lord's doing, to repay him according to his actions for transgressing the three prohibitions /of Deut. 17:16-17/, so that he should go three years in exile. As soon as Ashmedai took the ring, he hurled it into the sea, and a fish came along and swallowed it. Then Ashmedai threw Solomon four hundred parasangs /about 1600 miles/ across the earth and banished him from the throne. Solomon lost all his beauty, for he was thrown such a great distance. He begged from door to door, saying, "I am Solomon; I was king in Jerusalem." And people would laugh at his words, saying, "Israel has such a king as this who begs from door to door!?" He endured this tribulation for three years, because he transgressed the three commands of the Torah, that a king should not multiply wives to himself, that he should not multiply horses to himself, and that he should not greatly multiply silver and gold to himself. And he failed in all of them. At the end of that time,

the three years, the Holy One, blessed be He, decided to have compassion upon him for the sake of David his servant and for the sake of Naamah the righteous, the daughter of the king of Ammon, from whom the Messiah son of David will be descended. In order that Solomon should be joined to her and bring her with him back to the land of Israel, the Holy One, blessed be He, brought him into the land of Ammon. He came to the royal city, the name of which is Mashkaman. As he stood in the street of the city of Mashkaman, along came the king's butler, the chief of the chefs, who prepared and cooked the king's food, to get what he needed for his work. He found Solomon standing there and took him as forced labor to carry what he brought. He took Solomon back to the kitchen. When Solomon saw what the butler did, he said that he would stay with him and serve him, wishing nothing other than some food. Solomon found favor and stayed with the butler and served him and assisted him. After some time, Solomon asked to cook for the king some dishes according to his own style, since he was a great artist in those dishes. The butler gave him permission, so he prepared and cooked some royal delicacies. When the king ate those delicious foods which the butler brought him, the king asked the butler, "Who cooked these dishes, the like of which you have never brought me until now?" The butler told him the whole account of how this man had cooked them. The king ordered his servants to summon him to come before the king. The king said to Solomon, "Would you like to be my butler?" Solomon said yes. So the king sent away the butler from before him and installed Solomon in his place to cook all his food for him. After all this, the Ammonite king's daughter whose name was Naamah saw Solomon, and she told her mother that she wished to take this butler for her husband. Her mother rebuked her and said to her, "In your father's kingdom there are many honored princes. Take one of them who pleases you." But she replied, "I want no one but this butler." Her mother pleaded with her, but to no avail. She said, "No matter what, I desire no man other than this one." Her mother was finally forced to reveal the matter to her husband the king, that his daughter wished to marry the butler. When he heard that, he grew so enraged that he wanted to kill them both. But such was not the will of the Holy One, blessed be He. He

brought it about that the king took pity upon them, not wishing to shed innocent blood. So he called to one of his servants and ordered him to conduct them into a desolate wilderness, that there they might die of their own accord. The eunuch did as the king commanded him. He took them into the wilderness and then went his way back to the king to serve him as before. They went from there in search of food to sustain themselves. They came to a city on the shore of the sea, and Solomon went to find food. He found fishermen selling fish, so he bought one of them and brought the fish to his wife to cook. When she cut open the fish, she found inside it the ring with the Divine Name engraved upon it. She gave the ring to her husband. He recognized it immediately and put it on his finger. Instantly the spirit returned to him and he became clear-minded. Then he went up to Jerusalem and drove Ashmedai away and sat upon the throne of his kingdom and placed the crown of kingship upon his head. After that he summoned Naamah's father, the king of the Ammonites, and said to him, "Why did you kill two souls without any permission?" The king was frightened and said, "God forbid! I didn't kill them. I only exiled them to an empty wilderness. I don't know what happened to them." King Solomon, peace upon him, said to him, "If you were to see them, would you recognize them? Know that I am the butler and your daughter is my wife." He summoned her and she came and kissed her father's hands. Then he rejoiced greatly and returned to his own land.²²

Throughout all these midrashim on Solomon's reign, one lesson shines forth -- true power derives from righteousness, while sin brings disaster.

22. Beit Ha-midrash II, pp. 86-87.

CHAPTER 4
SOLOMON'S THRONE

I Kings 10:18-20 describes Solomon's throne. The rabbis greatly expanded that description. According to the rabbis, Solomon's throne was a miraculous creation, befitting a king of such extraordinary stature. They based this view upon the verse, THEN SOLOMON SAT UPON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23). One interpretation took this verse literally:

WHO IS THE KING OF GLORY? (Ps. 24:8). Why is the Holy One, blessed be He, called "the King of glory"? Because He apportions glory to those who fear him. How so? In the case of a mortal king, no one /else/.../is allowed to/ sit upon his throne. But the Holy One, blessed be He, caused Solomon to sit upon His throne, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT UPON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23).¹

But most midrashim read this verse to mean that Solomon's throne resembled God's:

We read that /Solomon/ MADE A GREAT THRONE OF IVORY (I Kings 10:18). This throne was after the supernal pattern and contained all celestial figures, and therefore it is written: AND SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING (I Chron. 29:23).²

There were other similarities between the two thrones:

It is written about the throne of the Holy One, blessed be He, AS FOR THE LIKENESS OF THEIR FACES, THEY HAD THE FACE OF A MAN... AND THE FACE OF A LION...AND THE FACE OF AN OX (Ezek. 1:10). And of Solomon it is written, AND ON THE BORDERS THAT WERE BETWEEN THE STAYS WERE LIONS AND OXEN (I Kings 7:29). And another verse says, LIKE THE WORK OF A WHEEL OF THE CHARIOT /taken here as referring to God's chariot, or throne/ (*ibid.* 33). No evil touches the throne of the Holy One,

-
1. Shemot Rabbah 8:1; Tanhuma, Va'era 8; Tanhuma Buber, Va'era 7. In Chapter 3, p. 73, this same verse is used to prove that Solomon ruled the whole world.
 2. Zohar, Bereshit 243a (Soncino II, p. 372).

blessed be He, as it is said, EVIL SHALL NOT SOJOURN WITH THEE (Ps. 5:5). And of Solomon it is written, THERE IS NEITHER ADVERSARY, NOR EVIL OCCURRENCE (I Kings 5:18). The Holy One, blessed be He, made six heavens, and dwells in the seventh. And of Solomon's throne it is written, THERE WERE SIX STEPS TO THE THRONE (I Kings 10:19); and he sat on top of the seventh.³

The six steps were ripe for midrashic interpretation:

THERE WERE SIX STEPS TO THE THRONE (I Kings 10:19). The six correspond to the six heavens. But aren't there seven heavens? R. Abun said, "Where the King resides is royal property" /"which must not be desecrated by symbolic representation"--Jastrow/. The six correspond to the six earths--Adamah, Arkah, Gei, Tsei, Neshei, Tevel....The six correspond to the six orders of the Mishnah--Zera'im, Mo'ed, Nashim, Nezikin, Kodashim, Tehorot. The six correspond to the six patriarchs--Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah R. Huna said: The six correspond to the six commandments concerning which the king is warned and commanded; as it is written, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY HORSES TO HIMSELF....NEITHER SHALL HE MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF...NEITHER SHALL HE GREATLY MULTIPLY TO HIMSELF SILVER AND GOLD (Deut. 17:16-17); and THOU SHALT NOT WREST JUDGMENT; THOU SHALT NOT RESPECT PERSONS; NEITHER SHALT THOU TAKE A BRIBE (Deut. 16:19). As Solomon ascended the first step, the herald would proclaim, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF. As Solomon ascended the second step, the herald would proclaim, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY HORSES TO HIMSELF. /So it went for all six steps./ As Solomon took his seat, the herald would say, "Remember before whom you are sitting--before Him Who spoke and the world came into being."⁴

As for the actual appearance of the throne, one description is brief:

-
3. Shemot Rabbah 15:26. In Pesikta deRav Kahana 1:7, R. Aha says that Solomon's throne resembled the seat of Moses, the figurative name for the seat of the elders in the synagogue. See Braude, p. 17, note 59.
 4. Esther Rabbah 1:12; Pesikta deRav Kahana 1:7; Bemidbar Rabbah 12:17; Devarim Rabbah 5:6 substitutes Deut. 16:21,22, and Deut. 17:1 for Deut. 17:16-17.

How was the throne decorated? A golden scepter was suspended behind it, and on top of the scepter was a dove. In the dove's mouth there was a crown of gold, and when the king sat under it on the seat of the throne, the crown all but touched his head.⁵

Legend, however, gives us a very detailed and lengthy description of the throne:

The Sages said: Solomon reigned over inhabitants of the upper world as well as those of the lower world, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT UPON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23). R. Yohanan said: Did he really sit upon the throne of the Lord? Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, caused him to sit and rule over inhabitants of the upper world and lower world, and made for him a throne in the lower world in the image of the Throne of Glory which is in the upper world. Just as on the throne in the upper world there are figures of four creatures--man, lion, ox and eagle /cf. Ezek. 1:10/--so also on Solomon's throne there were those four figures. R. Hiyya taught: Solomon made his throne in the image of the Throne of Glory by means of divine inspiration, along with a likeness of the wheel and the cherubs behind the throne. And in front of the throne he set up images of beasts and wheels. And sixty mighty men were stationed there, on whose foreheads were the sixty letters of the Priestly Benediction.⁶ R. Eleazar said: Solomon also polished all the gems and jewels so that they were like the heavens for clarity. And he fastened animals and beasts and birds to the throne, unclean opposite clean--a lion opposite an ox. R. Eleazar said: The image of the front of the lion was standing in strength with its two hands lifted up opposite the horns of the ox, and the horns of the ox extended toward the lion like two poles. R. Yohanan said: King Solomon affixed them to the throne, one on the right, one on the left; a lamb on the right, a wolf on the left; a deer on the right, a bear on the left; an ass on the right, an

5. Pesikta deRav Kahana 1:7 (Braude, p. 17); Bemidbar Rabbah 12:17; Esther Rabbah 1:12.

6. See also Chapter 7, p. 204.

elephant on the left; a buffalo on the right, a griffin on the left. Last of all he set up a man, and opposite him a demon. Above he placed a zeez /a small mythical bird/, and opposite that an eagle. And he set up a dove and opposite it a hawk. In /the mouth of/ the hawk was a tablet engraved with the snake from on top of the standard /of Moses; cf. Nu. 21:8/. R. Yohanan said: How did Solomon ascend and sit upon the throne? The ox would take him with its horns and give him to the lion, warning it as it did so, "Take care of King Solomon, that no evil shall befall him." The lion would give him to the ram, and the ram to the tiger, and the tiger to the lamb, the lamb to the wolf, the wolf to the deer, to the bear, to the ass, to the elephant, to the buffalo, to the griffin, to the man. Then they all would say to the man in a loud voice: "Behold, we have entrusted the king in good health to you. You are our witness." Then the man would give Solomon to the demon. The demon would fly off with him up between heaven and earth, and then would bring him to his place and seat him on the seat of gold, covered entirely with gems and jewels. Then the demon would ascend to heaven and bring back a sapphire tile and place it under Solomon's feet. His students asked R. Yohanan, "Did the demon really have the power to ascend to heaven?" He told them, "Have we not learned eight things which are said of demons? In four ways they are like the ministering angels, and in four ways they are like humans. They eat and drink as humans do, and they have sex and procreate as do humans, and they die as do humans. But like the ministering angels they have wings, they are invisible, they can travel all over the world, and they know the upper world as well as the lower." After Solomon was seated, the dove of gold would bring the king the scroll of the Torah and place it on his knees and he would read from it, to fulfill what is said, IT /a copy of the Law/ SHALL BE WITH HIM, AND HE SHALL READ THEREIN ALL THE DAYS OF HIS LIFE (Deut. 17:19). R. Eleazar said: These are the animals which were carved on the throne. Half had horns and half were forbidden because of their hoof or their digestive system....The Holy One, blessed be He, carved them on Solomon's throne solely to show an example to Israel that in the time to come, each kind of animal would co-exist

peacefully with the others, as it is said, THE WOLF AND THE LAMB SHALL FEED TOGETHER (Is. 65:25), AND THE WOLF SHALL DWELL WITH THE LAMB, AND THE LEOPARD SHALL LIE DOWN WITH THE KID....AND THE COW AND THE BEAR SHALL FEED, etc. (Is. 11:6-7). R. Yohanan said: They would all lift up their voices together and the sound would shake the whole world--the ox would low, the lion roar, the ram shout, the tiger shriek, the lamb bleat, the wolf howl, the deer cry, the bear stammer, the ass bray, the elephant roar, the buffalo snort, the griffin murmur, the man sing with joy, the demon sing praise, the zeez would cry out and its voice would ascend to heaven, the eagle would scream like the sound of many waters, the dove would coo, the hawk would hoot, waking all the sleeping in Jerusalem, the snake in its mouth would whistle and from its voice all the sick of Jerusalem would become well. R. Eleazar said: This was the serpent which Moses made in the wilderness, and which Hezekiah king of Judah crushed up. His students asked R. Yohanan, "But was Hezekiah king of Judah justified in grinding up a serpent which Moses had made for a standard in the wilderness, whereby Israel might be cured? For so it is written, AND HE BROKE IN PIECES THE BRAZEN SERPENT WHICH MOSES HAD MADE (II Kings 18:4)." He said to them, "He would not have broken it up, but Israel was complacent in those days, and didn't seek compassion from the Holy One, blessed be He. For that reason he broke it up, so that they would seek compassion from God, as it is said of Him, I HAVE WOUNDED, AND I WILL HEAL (Deut. 32:39)." R. Eleazar said: What would Solomon do while sitting on the throne? He would take the Torah and consult it and then begin to judge Israel. At that moment the lion would cry out, YE SHALL NOT RESPECT PERSONS IN JUDGMENT (Deut. 1:17). The ox would amplify the words of the lion: NEITHER SHALT THOU FAVOUR A POOR MAN IN HIS CAUSE (Ex. 23:3). The ram would respond, FOR THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S (Deut. 1:17). The tiger would angrily reply, JUSTICE, JUSTICE SHALT THOU PURSUE (Deut. 16:20). The lamb would speak up and say, AND THEY SHALL JUDGE THE PEOPLE WITH RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT (*ibid.* 18). The wolf would cry out in an oath, FOR EVERY MATTER OF TRESPASS...THE CAUSE OF BOTH PARTIES SHALL COME BEFORE GOD (Ex. 22:8). The deer would cry out in words of truth, AND LET THEM

JUDGE THE PEOPLE /with righteous judgment/ AT ALL SEASONS (Ex. 18:22). The bear would raise its voice, JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY (Deut. 1:16). The ass would shake and say, THOU SHALT NOT WREST JUDGMENT (Deut. 16:19). The elephant would warn, in praise of Moses, HE EXECUTED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LORD, AND HIS ORDINANCES WITH ISRAEL (Deut. 33:21). The buffalo would cry out, NOW THESE ARE THE ORDINANCES (Ex. 21:1). The griffin would say, "You /plural/ shall judge between a man and his fellow /paraphrase of Deut. 1:16/, and you the king, judge between a man and his fellow." And last of all, the man and the demon would stand and say together, "There are JUDGES AND OFFICERS (Deut. 16:18), but you, O king, the Lord made to be supreme judge, to judge His people Israel. Judge in righteousness and in truth, that the Lord may make great your peace and that of His people Israel. For the whole world exists only because of three things--judgment and truth and peace." Our masters taught: Solomon would ascend the throne in three ways, and each way had six steps, and on each step were twelve small steps. He would ascend to the throne by a mechanism, and on each of the three ways there were partitions and pedestals. On each pedestal stood twelve lions, on each side, as it is written, AND TWELVE LIONS STOOD THERE ON ONE SIDE AND ON THE OTHER UPON THE SIX STEPS (I Kings 10:20). And two lions stood by the seat /see I Kings 10:19/. R. Eleazar said: The spaces between the jewels were all filled with rock-crystal decorations and there were palm trees surrounded with linen fabrics. His students asked R. Yohanan, "Why were there palm trees and linen fabrics?" He told them, "The trees were higher than the throne, fixed as they were on pedestals, and cords of fine linen and purple linen trailed from the top of the throne. On the trees were linen fabrics, and every hue was interwoven in them. When the wind blew them, they would cover the whole throne and all that was around the throne, a total of one hundred cubits. The fabrics looked like lightning and lightning flashes and flames of fire and like the rainbow. And there were golden bells tied to them, and when the wind blew them they would ring." R. Hiyya taught: There were seventy thousand chairs of gold around the throne, and in them would sit sages and their students and priests and Levites and the princes of Israel. And there were seventy chairs in the hall of the throne, in which the seventy elders would

sit. And there were two chairs opposite Solomon's, one for the seer Gad, and one for Nathan the prophet. There was one chair on Solomon's right, for Bath-sheba his mother, who would listen to his wisdom, as it is written, AND /Solomon/ CAUSED A THRONE TO BE SET FOR THE KING'S MOTHER, AND SHE SAT ON HIS RIGHT HAND (I Kings 2:19). And it is written, AND TWO LIONS STANDING BESIDE THE ARMS (I Kings 10:19). What does BESIDE THE ARMS mean? The two lions stood one on Solomon's right and one on his left. When the king would come to sit down, the lion on the left would reach out, take the crown and place it on the king's head. The lion on the right would take a golden scepter and hand it to the king. A silver crocodile would run, by mechanism, and bow down to the king, and the eagles would spread their wings. When Solomon decided judgments, the lions would open their mouths opposite him and would cast light like bits of fire, and they would grind their teeth, and would rise up opposite the king in the hall of the gate. Then the king would be afraid to pass judgment, lest he might decide wrongly. So he would look to Gad the seer and Nathan the prophet, and they would decide the verdict through prophecy. Then the king would agree with them in wisdom, and they would announce their decision to the seventy elders, who would announce it to the princes of Israel, who would announce it to the messengers of the court, and they would conduct the person either to life or to death. Why were the two better than one? Solomon in his wisdom said of them that two are better than one, as it is written, IF A MAN PREVAIL AGAINST HIM THAT IS ALONE, TWO SHALL WITHSTAND HIM; AND A THREEFOLD CORD IS NOT QUICKLY BROKEN (Eccl. 4:12). The one applies to Solomon, the two to Nathan and Gad, and the threefold cord to the three of them. R. Yohanan was asked, "Why did the lions and the other beasts cry out before Solomon?" He replied, "In those days a court could inflict four types of capital punishment. The king would render the verdict and the lions would lick the king's feet, and the Holy Spirit would whistle and say, 'Blessed be King Solomon.' And those in attendance would answer as one and say, 'May the reign of the house of David be established!'"⁷

Along with the fabulous wealth of the throne, this description emphasizes its role as the seat of judgment. Solomon was warned re-

7. Beit Ha-midrash V, pp. 34-37. There is a similar description in Beit Ha-midrash II, pp. 83-85, with many interesting variations.

peatedly to render justice, and the throne even resisted him when he was about to make a mistake. But according to other sources, the throne simplified his task as a judge by serving as a lie-detector:

Solomon, in all the legal cases brought before him, could give his decisions without the aid of any witnesses, because the Holy Spirit was present at his throne, and everyone coming near to it was overcome with fear and trembling. There was an invisible figure hidden in the throne, and when anyone uttered a false plea it made a sound by which Solomon knew at once that the person was not telling the truth.⁸

Another source described this function of the throne in more mechanical terms:

When witnesses were brought to testify before the king, the wheels of the throne would turn and the lions would roar and the eagles would fly around and the peacocks would chatter. What was the purpose of all this? To seize the heart of the witnesses so that they would give true testimony.⁹

When Solomon left his palace, he would seal up his throne with a ring on which was engraved the Divine Name.¹⁰

After Solomon's death, his throne traveled through history to the successive capitals of the world's empires:

Our masters, may their memory be a blessing, said: When Ahasuerus sat upon the throne of his kingdom, he tried to sit upon the throne which Solomon had made through the great inspiration of the wisdom and skill of the Holy One, blessed be He. Israel said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the universe, how can this evil

8. Zohar, Shemot 78a (Soncino III, p. 232). See also Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10, and Midrash Tehillim 72:2.

9. Beit Ha-midrash II, p. 85.

10. Zohar, Shemot 112b (Soncino III, p. 335.)

one sit upon the place where King Solomon used to sit and judge Israel, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT UPON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING (I Chron. 29:23)? Take action for Your name's sake, and let the throne of Your glory not be defiled." And how did this throne of gold find its way to Media? After Solomon's death, Shishak king of Egypt went up to the land of Israel and seized Solomon's throne as part of the inheritance of his daughter and took it down into Egypt, as it is written, AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE FIFTH YEAR OF KING REHOBOAM, THAT SHISHAK KING OF EGYPT CAME UP AGAINST JERUSALEM; AND HE TOOK AWAY THE TREASURES OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, AND THE TREASURES OF THE KING'S HOUSE (I Kings 14:25-26). After that Sennacherib went up and captured the throne from the land of Israel, because he intended to make war against the Israelites /II Kings 18:13/. But in that account, Sennacherib was defeated at the hand of Israel /ibid. 19:35-37/, and they plundered his wealth. So the throne returned to its place, and Hezekiah sat upon it and derived glory from it, and his rule became mighty and he prospered, as it is written, AND HEZEKIAH PROSPERED IN ALL HIS WORKS (II Chron. 32:30). Hezekiah saw that the throne had six steps. Why did Solomon make the throne with six steps? To correspond to the six people that would be descended from David, namely, Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, and his /three/ companions /Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah--Dan. 1:19/. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he built the throne to correspond to the six kings of Judah who stood upon it, namely, Solomon, Rehoboam, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon and Josiah. In the days of Josiah, Pharaoh king of Egypt went up and made war against Josiah and took the throne from Jerusalem and brought it to Egypt and tried to sit on it. But he didn't know how it worked or how one was supposed to sit upon it, and the lion struck him on his thigh and he walked with a limp. Therefore he was called Pharaoh Necho, which we translate as "Pharaoh the Lame". When Nebuchadnezzar went up to Egypt, he found the throne there and took it back to Babylonia. He tried to ascend it and to sit in judgment of Zedekiah in Babylonia. Then the people of Israel said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the universe, the verse, EVEN OUR ENEMIES THEMSELVES BEING JUDGES (Deut. 32:31), has been realized." But Nebuchadnezzar didn't

know how the throne worked, and when he went up to sit upon it, the lion on the left struck him, and he fell off the throne. He was grieved by that until his dying day. Of this incident the Bible says, **HOW ART THOU FALLEN FROM HEAVEN, O DAY-STAR, SON OF THE MORNING!** (Is. 14:12) But did that villain, son of a villain, of the seed of Nimrod the Wicked, ever ascend to heaven in the first place? Rather, it means that when he wanted to sit upon the throne of Solomon which had been given to Solomon from heaven, he fell from the throne. So it is said, **HOW ART THOU FALLEN**, etc. When Darius the Mede rose to power and destroyed Babylonia, he too took the throne back to Elam in Media, in order to accomplish what is said, **AND I /God/ WILL SET MY THRONE IN ELAM** (Is. 49:38). But no one ever sat upon it there....When Ahasuerus saw the throne, he longed to sit upon it even more than had Nebuchadnezzar and Darius and Pharaoh, but he couldn't. So he brought craftsmen from Tyre and from Alexandria to make him another just like it. But they couldn't do it. Instead they made him a different throne, very lovely, and he sat upon it in the third year of his reign....¹¹

Another account of the travels of the throne differs somewhat from this previous one:

When Solomon died, Shishak king of Egypt went up and took it from the Israelites. R. Samuel bar Nahman said: This Shishak is actually Pharaoh. Why is he called Shishak? Because he came upon Israel with desire, and said, "I will take the throne as payment according to the marriage contract of my daughter." He made war with Zerah the Ethiopian and Zerah took it from him. Then Asa fought Zerah the Ethiopian, who fell by his hand, and Asa took the throne from him. So Asa and all the kings of Judah sat upon it. When Nebuchadnezzar went up and destroyed Jerusalem, he carried away the throne to Babylonia. From there it went to Media, then to Greece, and from there to Rome. R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Jose, "I saw fragments of it in Rome." Nebuchadnezzar sat upon it; Cyrus sat upon it. But when Ahasuerus came to sit upon it, he was not permitted to do

11. Beit Ha-midrash II, pp. 83-85; Otsar Midrashim, pp. 52-53; Aggadot Aggadot, pp. 57-59.

so. He was told, "Whoever is not a cosmocrat, ruling the whole world, cannot sit upon it." So he built one of his own, at considerable expense.¹²

According to one midrash, Solomon foresaw part of the fate of his throne:

ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL; THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND TO THE WICKED (Eccl. 9:2). Solomon looked through all of history and saw the things which happened to the wicked and those which happened to the righteous, and he said, ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL....TO THE RIGHTEOUS refers to Noah. R. Pinhas in the name of R. Yohanan in the name of R. Jose Ha-gelili said: When Noah came out of the ark, a lion struck him and crippled him. AND TO THE WICKED refers to Pharaoh Necho. When he sought to sit upon Solomon's throne he didn't know how the mechanism worked, and a lion struck him. This one died lame and that one died lame.¹³

Solomon's throne, then, matched perfectly his spectacular image as a king of unparalleled wealth and power and wisdom.

12. Esther Rabbah 1:12. See also Pesahim 119a.

13. Yalkut Shim'oni, Eccl. 9, section 989, p. 546a; Pesikta deRav Kahana 26:1; Vayikra Rabbah 20:1; Tanhuma Buber, Va'ethanan 1; Kohelet Rabbah 9:1.

Several midrashim relate Solomon's reign to the merit of one of his forebears. All but one of these midrashim deal with Ruth or her Moabite ancestors. The one exceptional midrash is the following one, in which Abraham is the worthy ancestor:

AND ABRAHAM BOWED DOWN (Gen. 23:12)....Corresponding to the two times that Abraham bowed down before the people of Heth /Gen. 23:7, 12/, all the peoples are destined to bow down before Abraham's descendants two times; once in the days of Solomon, as it is written, YEA, ALL KINGS SHALL PROSTRATE THEMSELVES BEFORE HIM (Ps. 72:11) /a psalm ascribed to Solomon/; and once in the time to come: AND KINGS SHALL BE THY FOSTER-FATHERS, /AND THEIR QUEENS THY NURSING MOTHERS;/ THEY SHALL BOW DOWN TO THEE WITH THEIR FACE TO THE EARTH (Is. 49:23).¹

Turning to Ruth, we find that the deeds of her ancestors contributed to her own selection as the great-great-grandmother of Solomon. Indeed, the matriarch of her own Moabite people, Lot's older daughter, deserves considerable credit:

R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of Joshua b. Korha: Let a person always be speedy in performing a mitzvah, since because of the one night by which /Lot's/ older daughter preceded the younger /in performing the mitzvah of procreation--Gen. 19:30-38/, she preceded /the younger/ by four generations in becoming an ancestor of an Israelite. Obed, Jesse, David and Solomon /descendants of Ruth, the Moabitess descended from Lot's older daughter--Gen. 19:37/ all preceded the first Israelite descendent of the younger daughter, as it is written, AND HIS MOTHER'S NAME WAS NAAMAH THE AMMONITESS (I Kings 14:21) /Lot's younger daughter was the matriarch of the Ammonites--Gen. 19:38/.²

This merit of the ancestors also works somewhat in reverse, as a merit of the descendants, in the case of Lot and his daughters:

-
1. Midrash Ha-gadol, Hayei Sarah 12.
 2. Baba Kama 38b.

R. Isaac said that God showed mercy in the midst of punishment....AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN GOD DESTROYED THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN, THAT GOD REMEMBERED ABRAHAM, AND SENT LOT OUT, etc. (Gen. 19:29), from whom in course of time issued two entire nations, and who was destined to have among his descendants King David and King Solomon.³

Balak, the Moabite king, unintentionally added to the national merit which would culminate in Solomon:

Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: Let a person engage in Torah and mitzvot, even if not for its own sake, because by doing so even if not for its own sake, one comes to do so for its own sake. In reward for the forty-two sacrifices which Balak king of Moab offered /Nu. 23:1-2, 14, 29-30--a mitzvah performed not for its own sake/, he merited Ruth's being descended from him, and thus also Solomon, of whom it is written, A THOUSAND BURNT-OFFERINGS DID SOLOMON OFFER (I Kings 3:4).⁴

In a parallel passage, R. Jose b. Huna identifies Ruth as the daughter of Eglon, the grandson of Balak.⁵ Eglon himself, in the episode leading to this death, added merit which Ruth would inherit:

/Ehud/ went in to Eglon and said to him, I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM GOD UNTO THEE. AND HE ROSE OUT OF HIS SEAT (Judges 3:20). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to /Eglon/, "You have shown Me respect by rising from your seat in My honor; by your life I will raise up from you a daughter, from whom will arise a son, and I will seat him on My throne." This was Ruth the Moabite, from whom arose Solomon, of whom it is written, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23).⁶

-
3. Zohar, Bereshit 107b (Soncino I, p. 345). Indirectly, this midrash also credits Abraham for Solomon's life and reign.
 4. Sotah 47a.
 5. Sanhedrin 105b.
 6. Tanhuma Buber, Vayehi 14, p. 220; Tanhuma, Vayehi 14; Ruth Rabbah 2:10. In the latter, the midrash is attributed to R. Bivi in the name of R. Reuben, and Orpah, Ruth's sister-in-law, is also said to be a daughter of Eglon along with Ruth.

R. Isaac made a model of Eglon's act of respect. Giving the biblical basis for a Jew's rising when the Tetragrammaton is pronounced, he pointed to Eglon, a non-Jew who rose upon hearing one of God's "nicknames", **אלה**. How much the more so should a Jew rise when hearing God's actual name.⁷

Orpah, Ruth's sister-in-law, also contributed directly to Ruth's reward, presumably by showing her willingness to accompany Naomi back to Judah (Ruth 1:7). R. Jose derived this by connecting the use of the verb "to give" in Naomi's blessing to Ruth and Orpah for their faithfulness, with a similar use in a verse about Solomon:

MAY THE LORD GIVE TO YOU / **אֵל** / (Ruth 1:9).
 R. Jose interpreted: "All the bounties which the Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to give to Solomon, as it is written, AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM (Kings 5:9), will be from you / **אֵל** /."⁸

The plural pronouns make it clear that Orpah too receives credit for Ruth's selection as the matriarch of the dynasty.

Ruth herself, of course, merited selection because of her great loyalty to Naomi, as the whole book of Ruth makes clear. R. Jose again used a pun to derive a connection between Ruth and Solomon:

/Boaz said to Ruth:/ THE LORD RECOMPENSE THY WORK (Ruth 2:12) /for her loyalty to Naomi/, by which he meant, "He who gives recompense to the righteous will give you your recompense."
 AND THY REWARD WILL BE COMPLETE / **אֵל** /
 (ibid.), the word hinting, so taught R. Jose, that Solomon / **אֵל** / will descend from

7. Sanhedrin 60a.

8. Ruth Rabbah 2:16. On Orpah's equal status, see note 6, and below, p. 123.

you.⁹

Finally, by using Chronicles as a source for midrash, the rabbis established that Ruth had in fact lived to see her reward in the kingdom of Solomon. R. Samuel b. Nahmani read I Chron. 4:21-23 as referring to David. He explained the phrase, WHO HAD DOMINION IN MOAB (v. 22), as referring to David's descent from Ruth the Moabite. Then he explains THESE WERE THE POTTERS /here understood as "creators"/ (v. 23), as referring to Boaz and Ruth, David's forebears. Solomon, who had entered the discussion earlier in regard to the phrase AND THE RECORDS ARE ANCIENT (v. 22), now reappears as the referent for AND THOSE THAT DWELT AMONG PLANTATIONS (v. 23). The next part of the verse is connected to Solomon's Sanhedrin. And R. Samuel read the last part of the verse within this context, as referring to Solomon, Bath-sheba and Ruth:

THERE THEY SAT WITH THE KING IN HIS WORK (I Chron. 4:23). From this one infers that Ruth the Moabite did not die until she had seen Solomon her grandson /actually her great-great-grandson/ sitting and judging the case of the harlots; as it is written, AND /Solomon/ CAUSED A THRONE TO BE SET FOR THE KING'S MOTHER (I Kings 2:19)--this was Bath-sheba; AND SHE SAT AT HIS RIGHT HAND (ibid.)--this was Ruth the Moabite.¹⁰

In a variant version of this midrash, the phrase, AND /Solomon/CAUSED

9. Pesikta Rabbati (Braude) 29/30A, p. 572. Braude, in a note on p. 570, explains that this midrash is not found in the Friedmann edition, but rather in the Parma MS. In Ruth Rabbah 5:4, this midrash appears in incomplete form. There is a break in the text and the pun is missing. It is restored in the Soncino translation, p. 60, with a note explaining that Z. Einhorn restored it to the text. There R. Hasa is credited with the pun.

10. Ruth Rabbah 2:2. The connection with the case of the harlots is unclear.

A THRONE TO BE SET FOR THE MOTHER OF THE KING, is taken to refer to Ruth, and R. Eleazar interprets MOTHER OF THE KING as "mother of the kinseship."¹¹

Two questions arise in regard to the midrashim on Ruth and her ancestors. The first is, Why should Solomon be singled out as the fulfilment of Ruth's reward, when in fact David fulfilled her royal destiny? Three responses suggest themselves. First, one notes that Solomon is not singled out in every case. David and Solomon are mentioned together in the two midrashim about Lot and his daughters, and David is singled out in the first part of the midrash on I Chron. 4. Since we will attempt here no comparison with the number of midrashim relating Ruth to David only, we cannot conclude that Solomon was generally viewed as the fulfilment of Ruth's reward. In those midrashim in which Solomon is singled out, one might suggest that this is the case because these midrashim depend on puns or word plays which only work for Solomon. For Balak, the connection is the sacrifices; for Eglon, the seat or throne; for Orpah, the verb "to give"; and for Ruth in one instance the word לִשְׁלֹחַ. But of course that is so because the authors of the midrashim sought out these word

11. Baba Batra 91b. Here Rav and Samuel are discussing Mahlon and Chilion, Naomi's sons who are identified with Joash and Saraph of I Chron. 4:22. Within this context, Ruth appears as the referent of Jashubi-lehem (*ibid.*), interpreted to refer to Ruth's returning to Beth-lehem with Naomi. Solomon again appears in regard to the phrase AND THOSE THAT DWELT AMONG PLANTATIONS, but here there is no prior preparation for his appearance. The Sanhedrin then appears, basically as in Ruth Rabbah. The conclusion differs not only in the use of the verse and the addition of R. Eleazar, but also in that Solomon is identified as Ruth's great-great-grandson, the case of the harlots is not mentioned, and Bath-sheba is not mentioned.

connections. So our question remains. The third possible response is that Solomon was considered the highpoint of the Davidic dynasty (see Chapter 3 , pp. 72ff), and thus was the full reward promised to Ruth. This is perhaps the most adequate response.

The second and more important question is, Why were the rabbis so interested in the merit of Ruth and her ancestors? Here the answer is more obvious. The rabbis could not fail to be struck by the irony of the fact that the Davidic dynasty was descended in part from a hated foreign nationality. Ruth herself was beyond reproach; she had displayed great humanity--and she had converted! In her case, the rabbis did not need to manufacture merit. They let the biblical context speak for itself, as we saw in the midrash punning on שלמה. But the rabbis obviously felt a need to make Ruth's ancestry look as respectable as possible. And here they had to contradict the clear meaning of the Bible, in which the Moabites were always viewed with hostility. So merit had to be manufactured. In the myth of Lot's daughters, the Bible intends to give the Moabites and Ammonites an eternal bad reputation. The rabbis sought to soften this somewhat by making the incest into a mitzvah. Balak, Israel's mortal enemy, also performed a mitzvah, said the rabbis, even though unintentionally. Eglon, whom God himself wanted dead, was transformed by the revisionist history of midrash into a model of piety. And Orpah was brought out of obscurity to prove that Ruth was not the only decent Moabite.

As good as she was, then, Ruth could not by herself clear the Moabite name. The rabbis remained uneasy with the irony. So they masterfully constructed a context of Moabite merit out of which Ruth

seemed to emerge. By sprucing up Ruth's family tree, the rabbis helped explain to themselves and their followers how this apparent irony had been pre-ordained, and for good reasons.¹²

12. The same softening can be seen in the halachic realm, concerning marriages to Ammonite and Moabite women who had converted. Cf. *Pesikta Rabbati* (Braude) 29/30A, pp. 571-2.

Solomon is best remembered in legend for his wisdom. This is, of course, based on the biblical narrative itself. In this chapter, we will follow the course of that narrative in our discussion of the rabbinic treatment of Solomon's wisdom.

Solomon asks for and receives wisdom in I Kings 3:4-15. God invited him, in a dream, to request whatever he wished. This was quite unusual, the rabbis noted:

IN GIBEON THE LORD APPEARED TO SOLOMON IN A DREAM BY NIGHT; AND GOD SAID: "ASK WHAT I SHALL GIVE THEE" (I Kings 3:5). R. Jonathan said: There are three people to whom it was said, "ASK" -- Solomon, Ahaz and the Messiah. Of Solomon it is written, IN GIBEON THE LORD APPEARED TO SOLOMON IN A DREAM BY NIGHT; AND GOD SAID: "ASK WHAT I SHALL GIVE THEE." Of Ahaz it is written, AND THE LORD SPOKE AGAIN UNTO AHAZ, SAYING: "ASK THEE A SIGN OF THE LORD THY GOD" (Is. 7:10-11). Of the Messiah it is written, ASK OF ME, AND I WILL GIVE THE NATIONS FOR THINE INHERITANCE (Ps. 2:8). R. Ahi in the name of R. Samuel b. Nahman added two others, on the basis of legend -- Abraham and Jacob.¹

Solomon's request also put him in exclusive company:

Three people requested wisdom from the Holy One, blessed be He -- David, Solomon and the Messiah. David said, TEACH ME, O LORD, THE WAY OF THY STATUES (Ps. 119:33). Solomon said, GIVE ME NOW WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE (II Chron. 1:10). God replied, "WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IS GRANTED UNTO THEE" (*ibid.* 12). Of the Messiah /יְהוָה יִשְׁמְעֵנִי/ it is said, GIVE THE KING /יְהוָה יִשְׁמְעֵנִי/ THY JUDGMENTS, O GOD (Ps. 72:1).²

The reasoning behind Solomon's decision to ask for wisdom showed

-
1. Bereshit Rabbah 44:8; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 3, section 173, p. 373b. Midrash Zutreta, Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 4, and Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 5, list Abraham, Solomon and the Messiah as the three.
 2. Midrash Tehillim 119:16.

considerable wisdom in itself:

What is the significance of AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING (I Kings 5:9)? R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yehotsadak: To what can this be compared? To a king who had a dear friend whom he loved exceedingly. He said to him, "Ask for yourself a preferment and I will give you whatever you request from me." The friend was a very shrewd fellow. He said to himself, "What preferment shall I request from the king? If I ask him to make me a governor, that's all I'll get. And if I ask him to make me a commander, that's all I'll get. Instead, I will request something to which everything else attaches, both honor and position." He said to the king, "Master, since you have made my heart presumptuous, so that I should think to request something from you, I ask of you that you should marry me to your daughter, that I be her husband." He said to him, "By your life, so will I do." Likewise, when the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself and said, ASK WHAT I SHALL GIVE THEE (I Kings 3:5), Solomon said to himself, "What shall I request? If I request silver and gold, that's all I'll get. If I request honor, that's all I'll get." So Solomon said, "Lord of the worlds, I ask that you give me wisdom and knowledge." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Since you have requested wisdom, by your life, all other things are attached to it. WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IS GRANTED UNTO THEE, AND I WILL GIVE THEE RICHES, AND WEALTH, AND HONOR (II Chron. 1:12)."³

One might think that the rabbis were here imputing greed and deviousness to Solomon. On the contrary, the context portrays his reasoning as proper and praiseworthy. They seem here to be emphasizing the supreme worth of wisdom.

In any case, this midrash rejects the explanation given by

3. Pesikta Rabbati 14, p. 59a; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 3, section 173, p. 373b; Kohelet Rabbah 1:1; Mishnat R. Eliezer 5 (beginning); Tanhuma, Hukat 6.

Solomon himself in the text (I Kings 3:7-9), namely, that he would need wisdom to judge the people. But the next midrash explains that Solomon needed extraordinary wisdom for the uniquely difficult task of judging Israel:

GIVE THY SERVANT THEREFORE AN UNDERSTANDING HEART TO JUDGE THY PEOPLE (I Kings 3:9). Is it possible that Solomon was unable to judge Israel? It says, AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM...AND HE WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN (ibid. 5:9, 11). And he couldn't judge Israel?! What Solomon was really saying was, "I am not like all the judges of idol-worshippers. A judge of idol-worshippers sits on his rostrum, handing down verdicts for execution or strangling or burning or stoning, and one has no appeal. But if I sentence someone to pay too large a fine, I will be summoned, as it says, ROB NOT THE WEAK, BECAUSE HE IS WEAK, NEITHER CRUSH THE POOR IN THE GATE, FOR THE LORD WILL PLEAD THEIR CAUSE (Prov. 22:22-3)."4

But another midrash takes the biblical text at face value. Here again, though, Solomon displays wisdom in his request for wisdom:

WISDOM IS BETTER THAN WEAPONS OF WAR (Eccl. 9:18). Solomon son of David saw in his wisdom that wisdom is beneficial to a person. Therefore he didn't ask his Creator for anything but wisdom....And it is written, GIVE THY SERVANT THEREFORE AN UNDERSTANDING HEART TO JUDGE THY PEOPLE, THAT I MAY DISCERN BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL; FOR WHO IS ABLE TO JUDGE THIS THY GREAT PEOPLE? (I Kings 3:9). This is the difficulty /of judging/: The hearts of people are not all alike. Who can /judge/ so that people will say, "All this is good"?5

One question that does not arise is why God offered Solomon such

4. Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 3, section 173, p. 373b.

5. Pesikta Zutreta, Behar Sinai (beginning), p. 69b.

a choice. An answer is implied, however, by the parable of the king who offers the choice to an especially dear friend. This answer is supported by a postscript to that same midrash:

AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING
(I Kings 5:9), means that He gave his wisdom
as a gift.⁶

This unconditional gift varies slightly from the biblical text. There, God is pleased with Solomon's request, and for that reason, promises him wisdom and all the things which wisdom can bring (I Kings 3:10-11). Another midrash agrees that "Solomon was found worthy of ... knowledge,"⁷ without saying why. One midrash does give a specific reason, viz.,

MAY THE LORD GIVE TO YOU /Ruth and Orpah/
(Ruth 1:9). R. Jose said: All the good
things which the Holy One, blessed be He,
is going to give to Solomon, as it is
written, AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM
(I Kings 5:9), will be from you.⁸

6. Pesikta Rabbati 14, p. 59a; Tanhuma, Hukat 6, p. 77b.

7. Zohar, Shemot 18b (Soncino III, p. 59).

8. Ruth Rabbah 2:16. See also Chapter 5, p. 120.

Immediately after the dream in which Solomon requests and is granted wisdom, the Bible shows us proof of the truth of the dream. The two harlots come before Solomon, and he renders the most famous judicial decision in history, thus proving to all his unprecedented wisdom. But this decision troubled the rabbis, because it was based on no real evidence. So they used this occasion to comment on the whole judicial procedure:

WOE TO THEE, O LAND, WHEN THY KING IS A BOY (Eccl. 10:16). It is written, THEN CAME THERE TWO WOMEN, THAT WERE HARLOTS (I Kings 3:16). Who were they? R. Meir said they were demons. Our masters said they were sisters-in-law / ~~שתי נשים~~ /. R. Simon said in the name of R. Joshua that they were actually harlots. Solomon rendered a verdict without witnesses or warnings. /The biblical narrative of the arguments of the harlots is briefly told in selected quotes. It illustrates the following point./ R. Pinhas and R. Jeremiah in the name of R. Hiyya bar Abba and R. Bivi in the name of R. Pedat said: This is the procedure in a trial: The judge sits and the contestants stand, and the mediator decides between them: /that is,/ the plaintiff presents his complaint and the defendant replies and the judge decides between them. R. Simon said: From this text we learn that the judge must repeat the arguments of each side -- THEN SAID THE KING: "THE ONE SAITH: THIS IS MY SON THAT LIVETH...AND THE OTHER SAITH," etc. (I Kings 3:23). THEN THE KING SAID: "FETCH ME A SWORD"...AND THE KING SAID: "DIVIDE THE LIVING CHILD IN TWO"...THEN SPOKE THE WOMAN WHOSE THE LIVING CHILD WAS, etc. (ibid. 24-26). R. Judah said in the name of R. Il'ai: Had I been there, I would have strangled him with wool. When he said, FETCH ME A SWORD, if the child's mother had not had compassion upon it, it would have been killed. And of that moment the text speaks when it says, WOE TO THEE, O LAND, WHEN THY KING IS A BOY. At that moment Solomon in his wisdom began a concluding argument. He said, "The Holy

One, blessed be He, created for man two eyes, two ears, two legs, two hands /meaning that the child had two of everything so that it could be equally divided/, precisely because he foresaw that this case would arise" But then he said, GIVE HER THE LIVING CHILD, AND IN NO WISE SLAY IT (I Kings 3:27). Of this moment the text speaks when it says, HAPPY ART THOU, O LAND, WHEN THY KING IS A FREE MAN (Eccl. 10:17)....THEN THE KING ANSWERED AND SAID: "GIVE HER THE LIVING CHILD," and the Holy Spirit cried out and said, "SHE IS THE MOTHER THEREOF for certain" (I Kings 3:27).¹

-
1. Kohelet Rabbah 10:18-19; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10. Devarim Rabbah Rabbah 5:6 includes several other instructions to judges, besides the order of the testimony and the requirement that he repeat the arguments:

R. Judah b. Il'ai said: I have heard that if the judge wishes to have the two parties seated, he may do so. But it is forbidden for one to sit and one to stand; as R. Ishmael said: There was a judge before whom two men came for judgment. One was poor and the other rich. The judge said /to the rich man/, "Either dress as he is dressed or dress him up as you are dressed." YE SHALL NOT RESPECT PERSONS IN JUDGMENT (Deut. 1:17). R. Eleazar and R. Samuel b. Nahman each commented on this. R. Eleazar said: If you realize immediately that the verdict will go to one party, don't tell him immediately, lest the other should say, "You intended to reward him from the outset." And R. Samuel b. Nahman said: If you realize immediately that the verdict will go against one party, tell him so immediately, so that he will not say, "From the outset you intended to find me at fault." R. Hanina said: One verse says, HEAR THE CAUSES BETWEEN YOUR BRETHREN, AND JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY (Deut. 1:16), but another verse says, THOU SHALT INQUIRE, AND MAKE SEARCH, AND ASK DILIGENTLY (Deut. 13:15). What are we to make of this? If you see that the testimony is deceptive, then inquire into it. But if you see that the testimony is honest, go ahead and judge on the basis of what you have heard.

Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 3, section 175, p. 373b, presents a more coherent version of the final segment of this midrash:

Solomon poured forth in his wisdom and said,

The strong objection of R. Judah and R. Il'ai conveys the concern of the rabbis that Solomon took a great risk on no evidence. This objection is answered by the inclusion of the Holy Spirit's confirmation.

A more complete version of the midrash follows:

R. Eleazer said: The Holy Spirit manifested itself in three places: at the tribunal of Shem, at the tribunal of Samuel of Ramah, and at the tribunal of Solomon.... "At the tribunal of Solomon," -- as it is said, AND THE KING ANSWERED AND SAID, GIVE HER THE LIVING CHILD, AND IN NO WISE SLAY IT; SHE IS THE MOTHER (I Kings 3:27). How did he know for certain? Perhaps she had acted craftily. But a heavenly voice came forth and said, SHE IS HIS MOTHER.²

The midrash goes on to consider the possibility that all three of these cases could have been decided by purely human devices:

Raba said: How /can we be sure that a heavenly voice came forth/?...Perhaps

"The Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that this case would arise. For that reason, He created man with pairs of everything: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two hands, two feet." So he said, DIVIDE THE LIVING CHILD IN TWO (I Kings 3:25). R. Judah b. Il'ai said, "Had I been there, I would have choked Solomon with a cord; and not after the child was dead, but after Solomon gave that order." When Solomon's officers saw what he was doing, they said, "WOE TO THEE, O LAND, WHEN THY KING IS A BOY (Eccl. 10:16). Were he not a mere boy, he wouldn't do such a thing." But when he said, GIVE HER THE LIVING CHILD, AND IN NO WISE SLAY IT (I Kings 3:27), then they said, HAPPY ART THOU, O LAND, WHEN THY KING IS A FREE MAN (Eccl. 10:17).

2. Makot 23b (Soncino, pp. 168-9); Bereshit Rabbah 85:26; Mishnat R. Eliezer 16, p. 311; Midrash Tehillim (Braude), Addendum to Ps. 17, section 17, p. 226.

Solomon simply perceived that one woman was compassionate and the other was not. But /the story of the heavenly voice/ is traditional lore.³

While this passage admits the possibility that Solomon's decision might have been unaided, other midrashim preferred the secure knowledge that God aided Solomon in his judgment:

Solomon, in all the legal cases brought before him, could give his decisions without the aid of any witnesses, because the Holy Spirit was present at his throne, and everyone coming near to it was overcome with fear and trembling. There was an invisible figure hidden in the throne, and when anyone uttered a false plea it made a sound by which Solomon knew at once that the person was not telling the truth.⁴

The next midrash contradicts this one, however:

/God gave Solomon/ a greatness beyond all others, in that Solomon was able to judge without witnesses /in the case of the harlots/. He requested that he be able to judge without witnesses all his life, but the Holy One, blessed be He, would not allow him to do so. It is said, KOHELET SOUGHT TO FIND OUT WORDS OF DELIGHT (Eccl. 12:10). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "/IT/ WAS WRITTEN UPRIGHTLY, EVEN WORDS OF TRUTH (*ibid.*). It has already been written in the Torah, AT THE MOUTH OF TWO WITNESSES (Deut. 17:6)."⁵

Both midrashim, however, express the same uneasiness with the idea that any mortal is able to judge without evidence. And both midrashim make it clear that Solomon's methods of judgment were not to serve as precedents for later judges.

On the basis of the harlot case though, legend attributed many

3. Makot 23b (Soncino, p. 169).

4. Zohar, Shemot 78a (Soncino III, p. 232). See also Chapter 4, p. 114.

5. Mishnat R. Eliezer 8, pp. 152-3.

other wonderfully wise judgments to Solomon. Here is an example:

There lived a certain man in the days of David, king of Israel, who was extremely rich and who had many male and female servants and possessions. He had one son. What did this man do? He brought much merchandise and gave it to his son. His son got on a boat and went to Africa and stayed there many years. During those years his father died and left his wealth in the care of a servant, the manager of his money. This servant began to subject all the rest of the household to terrible punishments until they deserted him, leaving him alone with all that wealth which his master had entrusted to him. So he ate and rejoiced in his lust for money. After some time, the son returned from the large cities around the Mediterranean and went to his father's home. There he found that his father had gone to his eternal home. When he was about to enter his house, the servant came out toward him and pushed him away and said to him, "What are you doing in my house, you scoundrel!" What did the son do? He took his staff and started to beat him on the head, and said to him, "Slave, you have confiscated all the fruits of my labor and that of my father, and you rejoice in the wealth." They got into a huge argument, and there was no one to mediate between them. Finally the son fled and went to complain against the servant before the king /David/. He said, "May the King live forever! A certain man has taken all the money which my father left for me, and he says to me, 'You are not the eldest son. I am.'" The king said, "Do you two have any witnesses?" He said no. He questioned the servant and asked him, "Do you have any witnesses?" He said no. So the king said to the servant, "Go in peace: You don't have to make any rebuttal." When the son heard that, he began to weep and cry out before the king a second and third time. He cried out to the king until the king rebuked him, and said to him, "If you can offer some new evidence, I will listen to you. If you have witnesses, good. If not, what can I do for you?" Solomon the king /to be/ heard of the matter and called to the

son from the side and said to him, "Appeal once again to the king, and if he gets angry at you, say to him, 'My Lord the King, if you can render no verdict for me, place the case in the hand of Solomon your son.'" David did give the case to Solomon his son, that he might render a verdict. Solomon said to the son, "Do you know where your father is buried?" He replied, "No." Then Solomon summoned the servant and said to him, "Do you recognize the grave of your father?" He replied, "Yes." So Solomon said to him, "Go and bring me the arm of your father." He went and cut off the arm of the old man and brought it to him. Then Solomon said to them, "Draw a little blood from yourselves and gather it into separate bowls." He said to the servant, "Dip the bone into your blood." He dipped it and it did not gain in color. Then he said to the son, "Now you dip it into your blood." This time the bone gained color, and Solomon showed all the people. He said to them, "Behold, this blood came from this bone." Immediately all Israel was astonished. All the money was returned to the son, and he ruled over the servant with force. Thus it is said, /Solomon/ WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN (I Kings 5:11).⁶

So even before he was king, Solomon showed extraordinary wisdom. He was a pioneer of forensic medicine. Note the similarity with the biblical story of the harlots. Here again, Solomon must prove the genuine blood relationship. The stories could have been even more alike, had the legend concentrated on the willingness of the servant to mutilate the corpse of his supposed father.

Note also that Solomon shows up his father. (See also Chapter 9 , p. 243.) Several similar legends exist:

A poor man resolved to stay at home and be sustained by God. On a day of extreme poverty a fat cow entered his house and the poor man killed it and ate it. The rich owner claimed it and appealed to David, who ordered the poor man to pay for the loss. Solomon then

6. Beit Ha-midrash IV, pp. 145-6.

asked his father to allow him to judge. He asked the rich man to forego his claim, but he refused. Solomon then invited all Israel outside Jerusalem, in order to show them his judgment. He brought a man to life who was buried under a tree and who turned out to be the father of the poor man. He had been murdered by slaves on coming home and robbed of all his riches. The instigator was this very same rich man. The son then rose up, avenged his murdered father, killed the man and inherited the property which rightfully belonged to him.⁷

A certain man who lived during the reign of /David/, king of Israel, had a beautiful and good wife, who was also very wealthy. The man was very old and eventually he died. Because of her beauty the governor of the land had his eye on her. He wanted to take her by force but she refused absolutely. But she became utterly terrified. So she took all her money and placed it in jars, and in the mouths of the jars she put some honey. In the presence of witnesses, she entrusted them to a man who had known and loved her husband. Then she fled the land. After some time the governor died and the woman returned to her home. Now the man who had received her deposit had thrown a banquet at the engagement of his son. He needed some honey, so he went and found the jars with the honey, and he took the little honey which he found in the mouths of the jars. This led him to the discovery that all the jars were full of gold. He immediately took the money and filled the jars with honey. When the woman returned home, she went to the man and said, "Give me my deposit which I left in your care." He said to her, "Go bring the witnesses before whom you gave me the honey, and then take what is yours." She went and brought the witnesses, and he brought out the jars, which he returned to her before the witnesses. When she returned home, she discovered that all the jars were full of honey. She began to wail and weep. She went to the judge of the land and sought to bring charges against the man. The judge said to her, "Have you any witnesses?" She said no. He said to her, "My daughter, what

7. Moses Gaster, The Exempla of the Rabbis, #353, pp. 130-1.

can I do for you? Go to King /David/ and let him render you a verdict. So she went to /David/ and he sent her to the Sanhedrin. They said to her, "Have you any witnesses to the fact that you left money in this man's care?" She told them, "I have no witnesses because I acted in secrecy out of fear of the governor." They told her, "My daughter, we have no authority to judge except upon the word of witnesses, for we cannot judge cases which are hidden in the heart." She left disappointed.

On the way home she met /Solomon/ who was still a lad, and who promised to help her if permitted by the king. Permission was granted and he ordered the jars to be broken in the presence of the king and the people, and two gold pieces were found sticking to the jar. So the man was ordered to return all the money.⁸

Some servants of King David were sitting at a meal eating eggs. One of them was extremely hungry and ate his portion before his fellows did. He became embarrassed because he had no food in front of him. So he said to his friend next to him, "Lend me an egg." He replied, "I won't lend it to you until you swear to me before witnesses that you will return to me its value and all the gain which a person could derive from one egg up to the time I demand repayment from you." He said, "All right." So he gave it to him before witnesses. After a lengthy period he came and demanded repayment. The borrower said, "You have no claim upon me beyond one egg." They went before King David, and found Solomon sitting at the entrance to the gate. It was Solomon's custom to sit at the entrance to the king's gate. He would say to all those coming for judgment before the king, "What brings

-
8. The first section is the version found in Beit Ha-midrash IV, pp. 150-1. The section beginning with the new paragraph is the version found in Gaster's *Exempla*, #403, p. 155. The story is actually about David and King Saul, especially in the Beit Ha-midrash version. But it is included in both books among the legends about Solomon, and it accords exactly with the others about him.

you to see the king?" The litigant would tell him, "Such and such has happened between me and this other fellow." So when the man who had borrowed the egg from his friend came, Solomon asked him, "What brings you to see the king?" He replied, "Such and such has happened." Solomon said to him, "Go before the king, and when you return, tell me what the king says to you." The two litigants went in before King David. The plaintiff brought witnesses that the condition between them had been for the borrowers to repay the gain that a person could have derived from one egg from that time until now. King David said to the borrower, "Go pay him." He replied, "I don't know how much." The calculation was made before the king: In the first year, one chick; in the second year, that chick could produce eighteen other chicks; in the third year, those eighteen could each produce eighteen more; likewise in the fourth year, and so on, until the figure amounted to an enormous amount of money. So the borrower left greatly disappointed. He met Solomon, who said to him, "What did the king say to you?" He replied, "The king has held me responsible for an enormous amount." Solomon said to him, "Listen to me. I will give you good advice." He said, "More power to you." He told him, "Go buy yourself some beans and cook them. On a certain day, the king wants to go to a certain place. You stand by the road, and as the troops of the king pass by you, sow the beans on a plowed field by the road. To everyone who asks you, 'What are you sowing?', tell them, 'I am sowing cooked beans.' And if they say to you, 'Who ever saw cooked beans sown?', say to them, 'And who ever saw a cooked egg from which a chick was hatched?'" So he went and did so, /and things happened just as Solomon had predicted./ So the borrower said to every regiment until the matter was reported to the king. When the king heard it, he said to the man, "Who instructed you to do this?" He replied, "I myself." David said to him, "Solomon's hand is in this with you." He replied, "By your life, my lord the king, he instructed me to do this, from beginning to end." The king sent for Solomon and said to him, "What have you to say about all this?" Solomon replied, "How can he be liable for something which could never have happened? That egg was cooked. No chick could have come from it." The king said to Solomon, "Let him go repay

the one egg." Of this the text speaks when it says, OF SOLOMON. GIVE THE KING THY JUDGMENTS, OF GOD, AND THY RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO THE KING'S SON (Ps. 72:1).⁹

In this last legend, David shows signs of aggravation with Solomon, who apparently made it a habit to overturn his father's decisions. So Solomon made a name for himself as a brilliant jurist even before he was king. Other legends add to his legal career once he assumed the throne:

During the reign of King Solomon, it happened that three men were traveling on the highway on the eve of Shabbat, and the day overtook them. They said to each other, "Let us conceal our money someplace." So they went and hid the money. In the middle of the night, one of them arose and took the money and hid it in another place. When Shabbat ended, they sought to resume their journey, so they went to the original hiding place, but they couldn't find the money. Each accused the other, "You stole it!" So they went before King Solomon for a verdict, and told him what had occurred. He told them, "We will render a decision in the morning." When he heard their story, he thought, "If I don't give them a verdict now, they will say, 'Where is Solomon's wisdom?'" What did he do? He sat and searched his wisdom and his understanding to be able to give them an answer and to catch the thief with his own words. When they returned to him, he began by saying, "I have heard that you are men of business, men of judgment. If you please, let me ask you for your opinion on a question which the king of Rome sent to me, to question me about something which happened to him in his reign:

"A young boy and a young girl lived in the same village, and they were infatuated with each other. The boy said to the girl, 'Let us make an agreement between us, by oath, that you will not accept anyone who wishes to become engaged to you without my consent.' She swore to him. In due course she became

9. Otsar Midrashim, pp. 347-8.

engaged. When her bridegroom came to ask her, she told him, 'I won't listen to you until I go to a certain person and ask his consent. For I swore to him.' What did she do? She went to him and said, 'Take much silver and gold, and release me to my husband.' He replied, 'You have hereby fulfilled your oath. I hereby release you to your husband. But I won't accept anything from you.' And he said to the bridegroom who had come with her, 'Rejoice in your lot in peace.' And they left. While they were on their way back, they encountered robbers. Among them was an old man, who took for himself the girl and all the silver and gold they had with them, as well as the jewelry they were wearing. He wanted to have intercourse with the girl, but she said to the old robber, 'I beg of you, give me a moment, that I may tell you something that happened to me.' So she told him the whole story. And she said, 'And if that young man acted maturely and subdued his evil impulses and didn't wish to touch me, how much the more should you do the same, you who are old and upon whom is the fear of heaven at every moment. Here is all the silver and gold I have with me. Release me and send me in peace, that I may go with my husband.' When the old man heard this, he lifted his eyes to heaven and added his own injunction: 'I who am old, walking on the edge of my grave every day, shall I do such a thing now?' What did he do? He sent her away with her husband, and returned to her all the jewelry and all the silver and gold which he had taken from them, and didn't try to touch or to derive benefit from anything belonging to them.

"So now the king of Rome has sent to me to explain which of all these people was most praiseworthy. Give me your opinions." The first said, "I commend the girl because she fulfilled her oath." The second said, "I commend the young man who overcame his impulses and didn't desire to touch her." The third said, "I commend the robber who stole the money and returned to them all that he had taken, and who overcame his desire to touch her. But if he returned the woman, why did he return the money?" Immediately, King Solomon said, "If this

man, who was not there, but only heard about it, is so concerned about money which he has never seen, what must he think about this money /in the actual case/?" King Solomon immediately ordered him to be bound and whipped, and he confessed to him and showed him the place where he had hidden the money. So everyone saw that the wisdom of God was in Solomon. From this one should learn not to steal, because all his secrets will be revealed and known.¹⁰

HE SHALL BRUISE THY HEAD, AND THOU SHALT BRUISE HIS HEEL (Gen. 3:15). A man was once walking in a field with a pitcher of milk in his hand. He came upon a snake who was crying out from great thirst. The man said to it, "Why are you crying out?" It replied, "Because I'm thirsty. What's in your hand?" "Milk," he told it. It said to him, "Give me the milk to drink and I will show you great wealth that will make you rich." He gave it the milk, and it drank. When it had finished, he said to it, "Now show me the money about which you told me." "Follow me," it replied. He followed it until they came to a big rock. It said to him, "Under that rock is the money." The man lifted the rock and rolled it away and found the money. He took it and brought it home. What did the snake do? It jumped up and wrapped itself around his neck. The man said, "What's this!?" It replied, "I'm going to kill you because you have taken all my money." He said, "Come with me to Solomon's court." They went and came before Solomon, the snake still upon him, so that the man cried out before the king. The king said to the snake, "What do you want?" It replied, "I want to kill him, as it's written, THOU SHALT BRUISE HIS HEEL." He replied, "Come down from his neck. It is not right that you should have a stronger hold on him than I do, since you two are in a court of law." It came down from his neck to the ground. The king said to it, "Now tell your story." It began to speak and said, "I will kill him, as the Holy One, blessed be He, said to me, THOU SHALT BRUISE HIS HEEL." The king said to the man, "And the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded you, HE SHALL BRUISE THY HEAD." Immediately, he jumped and crushed his head. From here comes the saying of the Sages, "The

10. Beit Ha-midrash I, pp. 86-7; Midrash Aseret Ha-dibrot 8.

only good snake is a dead snake" /lit., "The best snake is one with a crushed head"/.11

This fable is surpassed only by the magnificent psychological drama in this last legend:

Solomon had yet one other area of expertise, namely, his amusements. As is known to all, he invented the game of chess, and he loved it. One day he sat playing chess with Benaiahu his chief adviser, as he was in the habit of doing. But Benaiahu could not beat him, because the king was the inventor of the game, and he knew how to understand and play the game better than anyone else. So too on this occasion he was beating his adviser, as always, and in a few more moves Benaiahu's king would have been captured. At that point a huge commotion reached their ears from outside. Solomon got up and hurried to the window to see what was happening, and he saw on the street in front of the palace two men fighting, each trying to hit the other. Amidst all this, when Benaiahu saw that the king's eyes were looking outside, he took a knight from the king's pieces and removed it from the board. When Solomon returned and sat down to the game, he didn't remember or recognize that anything had happened. So now his position was weak and he couldn't beat Benaiahu. In fact, quite the reverse happened -- the victim became the victor. Solomon was upset and angry that this time his wisdom had weakened, since in his heart he knew that no man on earth could boast of greater wisdom in chess than he. Later he decided to investigate the reason for his defeat, so he went back and set up the pieces on the board and figured out their moves. By the strength of his wisdom he recognized that he had lost one piece without seeing it, and he said to himself, "Perhaps when I went to the window and I was looking outside, Benaiahu cheated and removed this piece without my knowing it. That's how he beat me. Still I refuse to disgrace him; but I feel much better knowing the truth. It's nothing; I must simply outsmart him to bring it about, before he understands my design,

11. Tanhuma Buber, Introduction, p. 79a.

that he will confess to me that he cheated me to rob me of my victory." So Solomon held his peace, and behaved as if he had paid the matter no attention and no longer remembered it.

One evening he was looking out his window and he saw two men walking stealthily with sacks on their shoulders. He understood their scheme to go out this night and steal, and that they intended to put the stolen goods in their sacks. The king quickly took off the clothes of his kingship and searched out some clothes of his servants and ran outside to the men and said to them, "May the Lord bless you, beloved friends. I have taught your craft to my fingers. Behold, in my hand, the keys to the king's rooms in which his treasures are kept. I have scouted about many days for a scheme to accomplish my desire. I sought and I found. But I can't do what I planned all by myself. So, if you wish, follow me and the three of us will become very rich together." The thieves agreed, for they didn't recognize him. They replied, "Just tell us what to do, and be our eyes. Leave the dirty work to us, from beginning to end." Then the king said, "But it's still too light. Let's wait until night, until everyone is asleep, so no one will see us on our way." So that same night the king said, "Let's go. Now is the time to do it." He took them and brought them to one room, and the thieves wanted to take what they found, but he said to them, "Don't take any of this, for you will find better than this to take for yourselves." So he led them into another room where many precious things were found. But he didn't let them touch those either, saying, "There is still better waiting for us. Don't weigh yourselves down with this stuff." Then he brought them into the room where the precious stones were stored, and he said to them, "Now go ahead and take all you want. While you are filling the sacks, I'll go out to watch the street by which we'll return, so that our tracks won't be discovered and we can go in peace." The fools were deceived into believing his words. They didn't know he was the king, or that what they were doing would cost them their lives. But Solomon went out and shut the doors of the room after him, and they were left imprisoned as though caught in a trap. Then the king went back and put on the clothes of his kingship and called

to his servants, "Be alert, for I saw what could be burglars in my rooms. You be sure, on your lives, that not one of them escapes." He put them on guard all night so the thieves could not escape with their lives.

The next morning the king assembled the Sanhedrin, of which Benaiah his chief adviser was a member. The king came and sat at their head and said, "You are the Sanhedrin, sages of truth, scholars in religion and law. Now if you will, render a just verdict. What shall be done to the thief whose theft is discovered, and he has stolen from the king?" When Benaiah heard the king's words, terror fell upon his heart and all his bones shook, because he thought, "So the king knows about the business with the chess-piece which I did to him. Now he has brought my case to the Sanhedrin. If I keep silent until they decide the verdict, then I will surely be punished as a criminal. It is better that I should confess to the king my deception whereby I deceived him. I will humble myself before him and beg his pardon. Perhaps he will look upon me favorably, pardoning my sin and forgiving me." So Benaiah didn't wait to be humiliated. He quickly prostrated himself before the king and pleaded, "It is I, my lord the king! I am the thief! In our last game of chess, when I saw that the king was looking outside, I dared to remove one of the king's pieces from the board. Because of that, I was able to win. I beg of you, my king and lord, with my own mouth I have confessed in your hearing and in that of the Sanhedrin sitting before you. Therefore I beg you, pardon my sin and clear me from a harsh verdict." When the king heard his friend's words, he laughed and said, "Relax, Benaiah my friend! I am not here on your account, nor is it for you that I have assembled the Sanhedrin for judgment. I have already forgotten what you did to me, and I have also forgiven you. Rather, this is why I have summoned the Sanhedrin today: Last night I apprehended in the rooms of my palace two burglars who had come to empty my storehouses. Now you the Sanhedrin -- give a wise verdict!" The Sanhedrin considered the case wisely and decided to hang the thieves on a tree.

King Solomon then was elated, because through the matter of the thieves he had accomplished his desire to mislead Benaiah into a groundless fear so that he would confess about the piece which he had removed. Then Solomon knew that his original

skill at chess had not deserted him. For had Benaiahu not confessed, the Sanhedrin would never have known a thing about it. But the case of the thieves had come along at just the right moment, so that Solomon could prove his wisdom yet another time.¹²

12. Beit Ha-midrash VI, pp. 124-6.

III

Solomon's wisdom is next mentioned in I Kings 5:9-14. These few verses inspired many midrashim, as the rabbis sought to describe in detail the nature and the extent of such great wisdom. This section will deal with those midrashim related to verses 9-11, all of which are general descriptions of Solomon's wisdom. The rabbis first asked why his wisdom was compared to the sand on the sea-shore (I Kings 5:9):

Our masters said: This teaches that Solomon's wisdom was equal to that of all Israel, who likewise are compared to the sand, as it is said, THE NUMBER OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL SHALL BE AS THE SAND OF THE SEA (Hosea 2:1). But how could this be? The Sages had knowledge. The Elders had knowledge. The children had knowledge. But if they were separated from each other, with Israel standing on one side and Solomon on the other, his wisdom would be greater than theirs. But R. Levi said: Just as the sand forms a boundary and a restraint so that the sea doesn't inundate the world, so did his wisdom stand up against his evil impulses to keep him from sinning. As the saying goes, "If you lack wisdom, what can you acquire? But if you have acquired wisdom, what can you lack?" LIKE A CITY BROKEN DOWN AND WITHOUT A WALL, SO IS HE WHOSE SPIRIT IS WITHOUT RESTRAINT (Prov. 25:28).¹

Another source read the comparison more literally:

AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM (I Kings 5:9). The text compares his wisdom to the sea and to the sand. It was as the sand in breadth and as the sea in depth.²

In the next two verses, Solomon's wisdom is said to exceed that of all other supposedly wise men in the world. The rabbis fleshed

1. Tanhuma, Hukat 6, p. 77b; Tanhuma Buber, Hukat 10, p. 109; Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3, p. 59; Pesikta Rabbati 14, p. 59a; Kohelet Rabbah 7:41; Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3. On R. Levi's comment, see also Chapter 2, pp. 54.

2. Mishnat R. Eliezer 4 (end), p. 88.

out these references:

AND SOLOMON'S WISDOM EXCELLED THE WISDOM OF ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE EAST (I Kings 5:10). And what was the wisdom of the people of the east? They knew astrology and were experts in divination from birdsAND ALL THE WISDOM OF EGYPT (*ibid.*) What was the wisdom of Egypt? You must infer that when Solomon sought to build the Temple, he sent to Pharaoh Necho and said to him, "Send me craftsmen whom I will pay. For I want to build the Temple." What did Pharaoh do? He gathered all his astrologers and told them, "Figure out which craftsmen are destined to die within the year, and I will send them to Solomon, so that I may come upon him with a grievance. I will say to him, 'Give me reparations for the craftsmen whom you have killed.'" When the craftsmen came to Solomon, he recognized, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, that they would die within the year. He gave them their shrouds and sent them back to Pharaoh with the message, "Had you no shrouds in which to bury your dead? Here are the shrouds. Now go bury your dead."³ For that reason it is said, /SOLOMON'S WISDOM EXCELLED.../ ALL THE WISDOM OF EGYPT. FOR HE WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN: THAN ETHAN THE EZRAHITE, AND HEMAN, AND CALCOL, AND DARDA, THE SONS OF MAHOL (*ibid.* 11). THAN ALL MEN /חֲכָמֵי מִצְרָיִם/ means he was wiser than Adam /אָדָם/. And what was his /Adam's/ wisdom? You must infer that when the Holy One, blessed be He, intended to create man, he took counsel with the ministering angels. He said to them, LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE (Gen. 1:26). They said before Him, WHAT IS MAN THAT THOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM? (Ps. 8:5). He replied, "The man which I intend to create will have greater wisdom than you." What did he do? He gathered all the cattle and the beasts and the birds and passed them before the angels. He asked them, "What are the names of all these?" The angels didn't know. When He created man, He passed the animals before him and asked him, "What are the names of all these?" He replied, "This one should

3. See also Chapter 1, pp. 16f.

be called a bull, and this one lion and this one horse and this one donkey and this one camel and this one eagle," and so on for all of them, as it is said, AND THE MAN GAVE NAMES TO ALL CATTLE, etc. (Gen. 2:20). And God asked him, "And you, what is your name?" "Man" / אָדָם /, he replied. "Why?" "Because I was created from the earth" / אֶדְמָה /.

Then the Holy One, blessed be He, asked him, "And I, what is My name?" "The Lord," he replied. "Why?" "Because You are the Lord of all creatures." And it is written, "I AM THE LORD, THAT IS MY NAME (Is. 42:8), the name by which Adam called me. It is the name which I have prescribed between Me and My creatures."

THAN ETHAN THE EZRAHITE -- this refers to Abraham, as it is said, MASCHIL OF ETHAN THE EZRAHITE (Ps. 89:1).⁴ AND HEMAN / חֵמָן / -- this refers to Moses, as it is said, HE IS TRUSTED / אֲמוּנָה / IN ALL MY HOUSE (Nu. 12:7). AND CALCOL / קַלְכֹּל / -- this refers to Joseph, as it is said, AND JOSEPH SUSTAINED / וַיְסַמְכֵם / HIS FATHER (Gen. 47:12). The Egyptians said, "This slave shall reign over us only if he is wise." What did they do? They brought him seventy pieces of paper, with seventy languages written on them, and threw them before him. He read each one in its own language. Not only that, but he spoke in the holy tongue, which they didn't understand, and to which they had not the strength to listen, as it is said, HE APPOINTED IT IN JOSEPH FOR A TESTIMONY, WHEN HE WENT FORTH AGAINST THE LAND OF EGYPT. THE SPEECH OF ONE THAT I KNEW NOT DID I HEAR (Ps. 81:6). AND DARDA / דַּרְדָּע / -- this refers to the generation / דֹר / of the wilderness, who had knowledge / דַעַת, so דֹר דַעַת = דַעַת. THE SONS OF MAHOL / מְחֹל / -- this refers to the people of Israel, whom the Shechinah pardoned / וַיְסַלַח / for the making of the Golden Calf.⁵

We will also include here several midrashim not based on the text of I Kings 5:9-11, but which also describe Solomon's wisdom:

AGUR (Prov. 30:1) is Solomon. Why was he called

4. See footnote #2, p. 34.

5. Tanhuma, Hukat 6, pp. 77b-78a; Tanhuma Buber, Hukat 11-13, pp. 109-111; Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3. pp. 60-62; Pesikta Rabbati 14, pp. 59b-60a; Kohelet Rabbah 7:41; Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3.

Agur? Our masters said: "Agur" connotes gathering, which teaches that his wisdom was gathered within him and he didn't need to search for it.⁶

Another interpretation of Agur: The agorah /אגורא = penny/ is actually a gerah /an ancient coin/, as it is said, EVERY ONE... SHALL COME AND BOW DOWN TO /God's priest/ FOR A PIECE OF SILVER /שכר כהן?/. And it says, THE SHEKEL IS TWENTY GERAH'S (Ex. 30:13). This teaches that Solomon's /Agur's/ wisdom was broad and deep, and he was precise about finances /lit., "about the shekel and the gerah"/.⁷

As the passage from Kings says, Solomon was the archetype of the wise man:

Idol-worshippers, when they are eating and drinking, occupy themselves with words of folly: "Who is as wise as Balaam?! Who is as mighty as Goliath?! Who is as rich as Haman?!" But Israel then comes and says to them, "Ahitophel wasn't wise?! Solomon wasn't wise?!"⁸

A WISE SON MAKETH A GLAD FATHER (Prov. 10:1). This refers to Solomon, the wisest of all, who gladdened the Holy One, blessed be He, with all his wisdom.⁹

Indeed, he became a symbol of wisdom:

Our masters taught: If one sees King David in a dream, he may expect to attain piety; if he sees King Solomon, he may expect to attain wisdom; if he sees Ahab, he should worry about some calamity.¹⁰

6. Mishnat R. Eliezer 4 (beginning), p. 65.

7. Ibid. (end), p. 88.

8. Bemidbar Rabbah 10:3.

9. Midrash Mishle 10:1.

10. Berachot 57b.

In this section we will discuss midrashim on the next verse, I Kings 5:12, dealing with Solomon's proverbs and songs. This is really the subject of Chapter 7. Here, then, we will discuss them only in general, adding a few examples of sayings which the midrashim related to Solomon's own life.

The verse itself created a problem which demanded an answer from the rabbis:

AND HE SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS; AND HIS SONGS WERE A THOUSAND AND FIVE (I Kings 5:12). R. Samuel b. Nahman said: We have searched the whole Bible, but we have found that Solomon was inspired to utter no more than about eight hundred verses /of proverbs/. And yet it says THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS. But this teaches that each and every verse which he was inspired to utter has two or three meanings, as it says, AS AN EAR-RING OF GOLD, AND AN ORNAMENT OF FINE GOLD (Prov. 25:12).¹ But our masters said: Three thousand proverbs derive from each and every verse, and a thousand and five meanings apply to each and every proverb. For "Solomon's songs were a thousand and five" is not what's written here, but rather, "its songs," i.e., the meanings of each proverb.²

The rabbis were, of course, experts at deriving meanings from Solomon's sayings. A few such midrashim created a story about Solomon to place his sayings within an appealing context. The following is a small example:

King Solomon, when he "penetrated into the depths of the nut garden" (as it is written, I DESCENDED INTO THE NUT GARDEN, Song 6:11), took a nut-shell (klifah) and drew an analogy from its layers to /the/ spirits which inspire sensual desires in human beings, as it is

-
1. The two similes make for two different meanings.
 2. Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3, p. 62 (Braude, p. 68); Pesikta Rabbati 14, pp. 60a-b; Tanhuma, Hukat 6, p. 78a; Tanhuma Buber, Hukat 14, p. 111; Kohelet Rabbah 7:42; Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3.

written, THE DELIGHTS OF THE SONS OF MEN (are from) MALE AND FEMALE DEMONS (Eccl. 2:8). This verse also indicates that the pleasures in which men indulge in the time of sleep give birth to multitudes of demons.³

In another case, the story is a full-blown folk legend:

King Solomon, peace be upon him, was divinely inspired to say, ONE MAN AMONG A THOUSAND HAVE I FOUND; BUT A WOMAN AMONG ALL THOSE HAVE I NOT FOUND (Eccl. 7:28). When the people and the Sanhedrin heard this, they were astonished. Solomon said, "If you wish, I shall show you." "Please," they all said. He told them, "Seek out a woman from the best in the city, and likewise the best man of them all." They searched and found a man who had a good and lovely wife. The king sent to summon him, and he was brought before the king. The king said to him, "I want you to know that I want to give you honor, and to make you the head of my palace." He replied, "I am your servant and wish to be as one of your servants." King Solomon said to him, "If so, go and kill your wife and bring me her head tonight, and tomorrow I will give you my daughter and make you an officer over much of Israel." The man said, "I will do as you wish." He went home to his lovely wife and his small children. He was grief-stricken, and wept and moaned. When his wife saw from his face that he was upset, she confronted him and said, "What is the matter, my Lord? I see that you are upset." He told her, "Let me be. I have a great worry on my mind." She immediately brought him food and drink, but he wouldn't eat. He was distraught. "What, shall I kill my wife, and leave my children without her?" Then he said to his wife, "Go and lie down with your children." When she had lain down and fell asleep he unsheathed his sword to kill her, but he found her small son asleep between her breasts, and the other was leaning against her shoulder. And he said, "Woe is me. What shall I do? If I kill her, these small children will die." So he put away his sword and said, "May the

3. Zohar, Bereshit 19b (Soncino I, p. 83).

Lord rebuke you, Satan." "But," said King Solomon, "at that moment, Satan re-entered his heart." Again he said, "I will kill her, and tomorrow the king will give me his daughter and part of his wealth." So he took out his sword, but he saw her hair spread over the faces of the children. Then compassion entered his heart, and he said, "Even if the king should give me all his house and all his wealth, I will not kill my wife." Immediately he put away his sword in its sheath and lay down with his wife until morning. Then the king's messengers came for him and led him before the king. The king asked him, "What have you done? Did you fulfill what you said?" He replied, "If it please the king, let him not press me on this matter. I tried to do it more than once, but my heart wouldn't let me." Solomon said, "Behold, ONE MAN AMONG A THOUSAND HAVE I FOUND." The man left, and Solomon did nothing more for thirty days. After thirty days, the king sent secretly to his wife and brought her before him. He said to her, "Have you a good husband?" "Yes," she said. "I have heard," he said, "of your beauty and the splendor of your countenance. I would love to marry you and make you queen over all the noble women of the kingdom, and I will clothe you with gold from head to toe." She said, "Whatever you wish, I will do." He said, "Only one thing stands in our way. I can't do a thing, since you have a husband." She replied, "So what shall we do?" He told her, "Kill your husband, and afterwards I will marry you." "So shall we do," she said. Solomon thought, "If that's her reaction, she will actually kill her husband. I'd better think of some device so that he will not be killed." So he gave her a sabre made of tin. When she saw that it shone, he said, "Kill him with this sabre. As soon as you place it on his neck, he will be cut." With the sabre, she returned home to her husband. Her husband approached, and she went up to him and hugged and kissed him and said to him, "Sit down, my lord, the crown of my head." When he heard that, he was elated. So he sat down and suspected no evil. She immediately brought dinner and they ate. Her husband said to her, "My wife, what are you doing tonight?" She said, "I shall seek

to make you happy and to see you drunk tonight." He laughed at her with happiness, and drank and became drunk so that he fell asleep. When she saw this, she girded up her loins and took out the sabre which the king had given her, and she began to cut his skin. Immediately her husband woke up and saw his wife standing over him to kill him. He said to her, "Tell me what's going on! Who gave you this sabre? What's this all about? If you don't tell me, I'll tear you limb from limb!" She answered, "This is what King Solomon told me." He told her, "Have no fear." When morning came, the king's messengers came for them. He went with his wife to the king, and the Sanhedrin sitting before him. When the king saw them, he laughed. He said to them, "I beg you, please, tell me what happened." The man said, "Such and such happened, and I woke up and found my wife standing over me to kill me. If the sabre had not been made of tin, I'd be a dead man. I had compassion on her, but she had none for me." Solomon said, "I knew that women had no compassion. For that reason, I gave her a sabre of tin." And when the Sanhedrin heard this, they said, "What the king said is true -- ONE MAN AMONG A THOUSAND HAVE I FOUND; BUT A WOMAN AMONG ALL THOSE HAVE I NOT FOUND."⁴

This is an unusually cynical view of women, and a very pessimistic view of human nature in general. The tone is lightened somewhat by Solomon's laughing over his test, but we can hardly find him very attractive for playing with his subjects so cruelly. The story does express well the meaning of the verse from Ecclesiastes. And Solomon again proves his wisdom, through his saying, through his test, and through the precaution of the tin sabre.

4. Beit Ha-midrash IV, pp. 146-8.

In this section we will discuss midrashim related to I Kings 5:13, some of which are related directly, others less so. In general these midrashim discuss Solomon's knowledge of nature.

The language of the verse raised a problem for the rabbis:

AND HE SPOKE UPON / 73 / TREES, FROM THE CEDAR THAT IS IN LEBANON EVEN UNTO THE HYSSOP THAT SPRINGETH OUT OF THE WALL (I Kings 5:13). Is it likely, as the verse seems to say, that a man would speak while perched upon treetops? What the verse really says, however, is that in the course of his speculations Solomon spoke upon the uses of trees, upon the CEDAR THAT IS IN LEBANON, and upon THE HYSSOP THAT SPRINGETH OUT OF THE WALL. Asking why Scripture requires that in the ritual cleansing of a leper both the cedar, tallest of the trees, and the hyssop, lowest of the herbs, be used, his answer was, Because when a man exalts himself like a cedar, he is smitten with leprosy; but when he humbles himself like hyssop, he is healed with hyssop /see Lev. 14:4/.

HE SPOKE ALSO UPON BEASTS, AND UPON FOWL (I Kings 5:13). But it is likely, as the verse seems to say, that a man would speak astride beasts and astride fowl? What the verse really says, however, is that Solomon spoke upon the subject of ritual slaughter of beasts and fowl. Speculating on why Scripture requires that in the slaughtering of an animal both the windpipe and the gullet be cut, but that in the slaughtering of fowl it is enough that either one be cut /see M. Hulin 2:1 and B. Hulin 27b/, his answer was that beasts were created out of dry earth, but that fowl, according to one verse, were created out of dry earth, and according to another verse, out of waters of the sea. Since one verse speaks /of fowl/ as having been created out of earth -- OUT OF THE GROUND THE LORD GOD FORMED...EVERY FOWL OF THE AIR (Gen. 2:19)--and another verse speaks of them as having been created out of waters of the sea -- GOD SAID: LET THE WATERS BRING FORTH ABUNDANTLY...FOWL THAT MAY FLY ABOVE THE EARTH, etc. (Gen. 1:20) -- /fowl are therefore considered in regard to ritual slaughter as being in a category between beasts which are slaughtered by cutting of both windpipe and gullet, and fish which require no slaughtering at all/.

In a comment on this matter, Bar Kappara

said that fowl were created out of sea mud /and so are beast-like/. But R. Abun said in the name of R. Samuel of Cappadocia: Maybe so, but the skin of chickens' feet resembles the scale-covered skin of fish, /and so fowl are considered fish-like/.

AND UPON CREEPING THINGS (I Kings 5:13). But is it likely, as the verse seems to say, that a man would speak astride creeping things? What the verse really says, however, is that Solomon was meditating upon this question: In regard to the eight creeping things mentioned by name in the Pentateuch /see Lev. 11:29-30/, why is it that he who hunts them or wounds them on the Sabbath is culpable, whereas in regard to other creeping things which are likewise forbidden for food he who hunts them or wounds them is not culpable /see Shabbat 14:1, and Hulin 9:2/? Solomon's answer was that he who hunts the former is culpable because they have skins, /the breaking or bruising of which makes a man guilty of working on the Sabbath/.

AND UPON FISHES (I Kings 5:13). But is it likely, as the verse seems to say, that a man would speak astride fish? What the verse really says, however, is that Solomon was speculating upon the following question: Why is it that all kinds of animals, wild and domestic, as well as fowl require ritual slaughtering, but fish do not? /A discussion of this issue follows./¹

Solomon did have special insight into nature, several midrashim tell us. For one thing, he understood the languages of animals:

AND SOLOMON AWOKE, AND BEHOLD, IT WAS A DREAM /in which God had promised his wisdom/ (I Kings 3:15). R. Isaac said: The dream immediately was verified. A bird chirped and /Solomon/ understood what it had said. A donkey brayed and he understood what it had said.²

This special knowledge became the basis for a legend in which Solomon teaches the language of animals to a friend. This legend

-
1. Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3, pp. 62-63 (Braude, pp. 68-69); Pesikta Rabbati 14, pp. 60b-61a; Tanhuma, Hukat 6, p. 78a; Tanhuma Buber, Hukat 14-15, pp. 111-112; Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3.
 2. Kohelet Rabbah 1:1; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:9.

is recounted below, page 162.

Solomon also was intimately familiar with animal behavior, as this next midrash suggests:

GO TO THE ANT, THOU SLUGGARD; CONSIDER HER WAYS, AND BE WISE; WHICH HAVING NO CHIEF, OVERSEER, OR RULER, PROVIDETH HER BREAD IN THE SUMMER, AND GATHERETH HER FOOD IN THE HARVEST (Prov. 6:6-8). What did Solomon see in the ant that led him to instruct the sluggard from its example? Our masters said: The ant has three homes, but it doesn't store its food in the uppermost house because of water leakage, nor does it store food in the lowest house because of dampness, but it stores it in the middle house. And the ant lives only six months. Why? Because whatever creature has no sinews and bones can live only six months. And all its food amounts to only a grain and a half of wheat, yet it goes and gathers all it finds in the summertime, wheat and barley and lentils. R. Tanhuma said: In its whole lifetime it only eats a grain and a half of wheat, yet it gathers all this food. Why does it do this? Because it says, "Perhaps the Holy One, blessed be He, will decree life for me, and I will have food ready to eat." R. Simeon b. Yohai said: Once it happened that three hundred kor /a dry measure/ which the ant had gathered for the winter were found in its hole. Consequently, Solomon said, GO TO THE ANT, THOU SLUGGARD; CONSIDER HER WAYS, AND BE WISE. So should you prepare yourselves in this world for the world to come. What specifically, does the phrase, CONSIDER HER WAYS, AND BE WISE, mean? Our masters said: Consider her customary behavior, how she refrains from theft. R. Simeon b. Halaftha said: Once an ant dropped a grain of wheat, and all the others passed by and sniffed it, but not one took it. The one whose it was returned and took it. Consider its wisdom, and its praiseworthy behavior, which it learned from no other creature, and which it follows even though it has no judge or police, as it is said, WHICH /has/ NO CHIEF, OVERSEER, OR RULER. You, for whom I /God/ have appointed judges and police, how much the more ought you to listen to them. As it says, JUDGES

AND OFFICERS SHALT THOU MAKE THEE IN ALL THY GATES (Deut. 16:18).³

Solomon knew botany and geology as well as zoology:

I MADE ME GARDENS AND PARKS, AND I PLANTED TREES IN THEM OF ALL KINDS OF FRUIT (Eccl. 2:5). But doesn't any person plant whatever he wishes? Whatever a person plants in the ground grows; whether peppers or any other thing, if a person plants them, they grow. But he may not know where to plant it, or where it takes root. But Solomon, who was wise, planted all kinds of trees, as it is said, I MADE ME GARDENS AND PARKS, AND I PLANTED TREES IN THEM OF ALL KINDS OF FRUIT. R. Yannai said: Solomon even planted peppers. How could he plant them /since they were not native to Palestine/? Solomon was wise and knew the root of the foundation of the world. Where was it? OUT OF ZION, THE PERFECTION / פְּדוּת / OF BEAUTY, GOD HATH SHINED FORTH (Ps. 50:2), /that is,/ from Zion the whole world was perfected / פְּדוּתוֹ / . Why was the rock on which the Ark stood called the יְסֵדוֹן הָאֵל / "foundation stone" /? Because the world was founded / נִסְּדָה / upon it. And Solomon knew which branch /of the foundation/ went to Ethiopia, so he planted peppers above it, and immediately they bore fruit. This, then, is what he meant when he said, AND I PLANTED TREES IN THEM OF ALL KINDS OF FRUIT. Another interpretation: Just as the navel is placed in the center of a man's body, so is the land of Israel the navel of the world, as it is said, THAT DWELL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE EARTH /referring to the inhabitants of Israel/ (Ezek. 38:12). The land of Israel is situated in the middle of the world; Jerusalem is in the middle of the land of Israel; the Temple is in the middle of Jerusalem; the sanctuary is in the middle of the Temple; the Ark is in the middle of the sanctuary. And in front of the sanctuary was the foundation stone, upon which the world is established. Solomon, being wise, stood above the roots going out from it all over the world, and planted in them all kinds of trees. So he said, I MADE ME GARDENS AND PARKS.⁴

Solomon was even a master chef:

3. Devarim Rabbah 5:2.

4. Tanhuma Buber, Kedoshim 10; Kohelet Rabbah 2:7.

Not only in matters of Torah was Solomon an expert, but CONCERNING ALL THINGS THAT ARE DONE UNDER HEAVEN (Eccl. 1:13); for example, how to sewwten mustard or lupins, and how to prepare a hot brew consisting of a third part each of wine, water, and pepper.⁵

Solomon acquired other kinds of exotic wisdom, especially of magic and the occult. This is discussed in Chapter J, pp. 92-96.

5. Kohelet Rabbah 1:33 (Soncino, p. 39). See also p. 105.

I Kings 5:14 tells us that Solomon's wisdom made him world-famous, attracting many people to his court. According to the midrash, Solomon displayed his wisdom by answering questions or giving instructions or advice. He never lacked an audience:

R. Aha said in the name of R. Huna: One group would come in as another was going out, to hear Solomon's wisdom. This is what the Queen of Sheba meant when she said to him, HAPPY ARE THY MEN, HAPPY ARE THESE THY SERVANTS, THAT STAND CONTINUALLY BEFORE THEE, AND THAT HEAR THY WISDOM (I Kings 10:8). And it is written, AND THERE CAME OF ALL PEOPLES TO HEAR THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON (I Kings 5:14).¹

The Queen of Sheba was not the only royal visitor who came to hear Solomon's wisdom:

/God/ gave Solomon greatness, in that all the kings of the earth would listen to his wisdom while bowed down before him, as it is said, AND ALL THE EARTH SOUGHT THE PRESENCE OF SOLOMON, TO HEAR HIS WISDOM, WHICH GOD HAD PUT IN HIS HEART (I Kings 10:24).²

Solomon's wisdom must have profoundly impressed his foreign visitors with the power of his God:

Of those who listened to Solomon's wisdom, 150,000 were converted by him, and they would praise the Holy One, blessed be He, and believe in Him, as it is said, AND SOLOMON NUMBERED ALL THE STRANGERS / זָרִים רַבִּים, here understood as "converts"/ THAT WERE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL, AFTER THE NUMBERING WHEREWITH DAVID HIS FATHER HAD NUMBERED THEM; AND THEY WERE FOUND A HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND AND THREE THOUSAND AND SIX HUNDRED (II Chron. 2:16). And lest you should say that they were converted in the days of David his father, the text clearly tells us, AFTER THE NUMBERING WHEREWITH DAVID HIS FATHER HAD NUMBERED THEM.³

Solomon also had a great positive influence upon Hirman the king

-
1. Kohelet Rabbah 1:2.
 2. Mishnat R. Eliezer 8, p. 152.
 3. Ibid.

of Tyre:

R. Jesse then took the text: AND THE LORD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM AS HE HAD PROMISED HIM, AND THERE WAS PEACE BETWEEN HIRAM AND SOLOMON (I Kings 5:26). What is the connection between these two statements? The answer is this: GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM; and how did Solomon display this wisdom that God gave him? First in this way, that he made Hiram assume a more modest frame of mind. For we have been taught that Hiram at first set himself up as a god, as it is written, THOU /the prince of Tyre/ HAST SAID, I AM A GOD, I SIT IN THE SEAT OF GOD (Ezek. 28:2). Solomon, however, with his wisdom induced him to give up these claims, and he deferred to him, and therefore it is written, AND THERE WAS PEACE BETWEEN HIRAM AND SOLOMON. We have also learnt that R. Isaac said in the name of R. Judah that Solomon sent him a carriage which took him down to the seven circuits of Gehinnom and brought him up again.⁴

The rabbis commended Solomon for sharing his wisdom with others:

A DIVINE SENTENCE IS IN THE LIPS OF THE KING (Prov. 16:10). R. Alexandri said: Solomon's wisdom was lovely because he taught wisdom to others in complete sincerity. How do we know? Solomon said, "I call the heavens and the earth to bear witness in my behalf, that of all the wisdom which the Holy One, blessed be He, gave me, I have not uttered one false word, but rather, everything I have said has been honest"; as it is written, HIS MOUTH TRESPASSETH NOT IN JUDGMENT (ibid.).⁵

This trait accounts for one of Solomon's names:

Why was Solomon called "Kohelet" /קוהלת/? Because his words were spoken in public /בקהל/, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON ASSEMBLED /וַיִּקְרָא/ THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL (I Kings 8:1).⁶

Legend embellished Solomon's image as a virtually omniscient teacher:

4. Zohar, Vayikra 61a (Soncino V, p. 46).

5. Yalkut Shim'oni, Prov. 16, section 954, p. 495a.

6. Kohelet Rabbah 1:2.

Once there were three brothers who went to learn Torah from King Solomon. He said to them, "Stay and serve me, and I will teach you wisdom." And he appointed them to be his royal attendants. They stayed for thirteen years. At the end of that time, they said to each other, "What have we done? We have left our homes and all that is ours for thirteen years. We came to learn Torah, but we have served him and haven't learned a thing. Let's get permission and return to our homes." So one day they went to Solomon and said, "Our lord, it's been thirteen years since we left our homes. Please give us leave to go see our families." Immediately the king summoned his treasurer to bring before him three hundred gold pieces. He told them, "Choose for yourselves one or the other -- either I will teach each of you three words of wisdom or I will give each of you one hundred gold pieces." Immediately they took counsel among themselves and decided to take the money. Then they received permission and left for home. When they were already four miles outside the city, the youngest said to his brothers, "What have we done? Was it for gold that we came here, or was it to learn Torah? If you would listen to my advice, let us go and return the money and learn Torah from King Solomon." They replied, "If you want to return the gold to learn three words of wisdom, go right ahead. But we will not return to purchase words with money." So the youngest returned to Solomon and said to him, "My lord, I didn't come here for gold. Please, take back the gold and teach me wisdom." Immediately he began to teach him. He said to him, "My son, when you go on a journey, take care that when dawn breaks, you are ready to go, and that you make camp in the evening while there is still daylight. That's number one. When you see that a river is swollen, don't try to cross it, but rather, wait until it returns to normal. That's number two. And never reveal a secret to a woman, even to your wife. That's number three." Immediately he received permission to leave, and he took his horse and galloped after his brothers. When he caught up with them, they asked him, "What did you learn?" "What I learned, I learned /and not you/," he replied. He continued with his brothers until three o'clock in the afternoon, when they came upon a place that was good for making their camp. The youngest said, "This is a good place to spend the night, since there is water and wood and grass for grazing the horses. If you wish, we can spend the night here, and when morning comes, God willing, we will go safely." They replied, "What an idiot! When you gave back the money and bought words, we

knew that you had no sense. We can go another eight miles before evening, and you tell us to spend the night here!" "You do as you wish," he said, "but I'm not moving from here." So they went on their way while he remained there. He cut wood and lit a fire and made a sort of shelter for himself and for his horse, and he grazed his horse until evening. At evening, he gave it barley, and he and his animal ate. Then he lay down for the night in safety. His brothers journeyed until evening, but they couldn't find any pasture for their animals, or any wood for a fire. And a great snow fell upon them, and they died from the great cold. But the snow did no harm to the youngest because of the shelter and the fire and the food and drink. When morning came, he prepared himself and rode off on his horse and took to the road and went after his brothers. He found them dead. When he saw them he fell upon them in tears. Then he took their money and buried them and went on his way. The sun came out and the snow melted, and the rivers swelled above their banks, so that he could not cross the river. So he got down from his horse to wait until the river went down. While he was walking along the side of the river, he saw on the same side servants of Solomon who were leading two animals loaded down with gold. They asked him, "Why aren't you crossing the river?" "Because it's swollen," he said. They tried to cross, but when they reached the middle, it flooded them and they died. The young man waited until the river went down. Then he forded it and took their money and went home in peace. When the wives of his brothers saw him, they asked him about their husbands. He told them, "They stayed to learn wisdom." Then he bought fields and vineyards, and built himself a mansion and bought cattle. His wife asked him, "My lord, tell me where you got this money." Immediately he got angry at her and struck her a violent blow. He said, "Why do you ask such a question!" But she cajoled him again and again until he told her the whole story. Once he became angry with his wife. She began to scream, and said, "It's not enough that you killed your two brothers, but now you want to kill me!" When his brothers' wives heard of their husbands' death, they immediately went and brought charges against him before the king. Immediately the king ordered that he be brought before him, and he ordered that he be killed. When he was brought forth for execution, he said, "Please allow me to speak my piece before the king." So they led him in to the king. He fell upon his face

and said, "My lord, I am one of the three brothers who remained with you thirteen years to learn wisdom. I am the youngest, who returned the gold to learn wisdom from you. And the wisdom which you taught me protected me." Immediately the king recognized the truth and said, "Fear not. The money which you took from your brothers and from my servants was rightfully yours. The wisdom which you purchased has saved you from death and from the hand of your wife. Now go and be happy with your wife." At that moment Solomon said, HOW MUCH BETTER IT IS TO GET WISDOM THAN GOLD (Prov. 16:16).⁷

This anti-woman moral, which we also saw above (page 152), is at the heart of another very similar legend picturing Solomon as the wise teacher:

In a distant land lived a friend of King Solomon who used to visit Solomon every year, and the king would always give him gifts to take with him back to his home and his people. One year the friend brought Solomon a precious offering, and a gift of homage. When he wished to leave Solomon, the king tried to give him a large gift in return. But he refused to take it. He said, "My lord the king, I desire no gift from you, because, praise be to God and to your loving-kindness, every good thing has grown great in my hand. I have much; I need nothing. But if it is my lord's wish to reward his servant with bounteous goodness, would that he would teach me to understand the chirping of the birds and the conversation of beasts." The king replied, "My brother, rest assured that I will not deny your request, nor will I refuse to do what you ask. But the thing which you have requested is very dangerous, and there is a hidden secret in it: If you tell one word of what you hear, you will immediately die, and no ransom can be paid for you." The friend said, "Come what may, please teach me a little of your wisdom. By your command, I will be forewarned of the immutable decree." When the king saw how great was his desire, he fulfilled his wish. Then the friend returned to his home.

One day, as he sat with his wife, his ox returned from its work in the field. They tethered it next to the donkey which was at the house, and they placed fodder before the ox, but

7. Beit Ha-midrash IV, pp. 148-150.

none before the donkey, because it was sick.

The donkey said to the ox, "Brother, how goes it for you with these humans?" The ox said, "Brother, by the life of my master, I have nothing but heavy toil, and great weariness, all day and all night." Said the donkey, "Brother, may I seek some respite for you and give you advice which will benefit you, and give you rest from your weariness and toil?" The ox replied, "Brother, would that your heart be so sympathetic as to have compassion and pity for me! I will not deviate from your advice either to the right or to the left."

The donkey said, "The Lord knows that I speak to you in complete honesty of heart and mind. My advice is that you not eat anything tonight, neither straw nor fodder. When our master sees that you do not eat, he will say that you are sick and that you cannot work. So he will not weary you, and you can rest and be at peace. Don't lose hope. Look at me! Today I was at peace and resting, excused from my work, since they saw that I was sick." Its advice seemed good to the ox, so it did exactly as the donkey had advised it. That night the man got up and saw that while the ox was asleep, the donkey went to its trough and ate until it filled its belly. When the man heard their talk, their words and their thoughts, and when he saw the deceit of the donkey, he was greatly amazed and he began to laugh out loud. Then his wife said to him, "What are you laughing about, you cruel prankster! There's no one else here." The man said to her, "I just remembered something that happened to me which made me laugh."

In the morning, he went to the trough of the ox and found there the fodder which the donkey had left. He told the servant, "The ox is sick and in pain. It can't work today. Take the donkey in its place. It will work for the two of them." At dusk the donkey returned exhausted. The ox asked it, "Brother, did you hear those cruel humans saying anything about me?" The donkey replied, "I heard them say, 'If the ox doesn't eat any fodder tonight, we will slaughter it and eat it.'" When the ox heard that, it was terrified, so it put its mouth into its trough as a lion upon its prey. And it didn't raise its head until it had eaten all the fodder. The man heard the donkey's words and its schemings, and he laughed loudly. His wife said to him, "You laughed yesterday, and I said, 'Perhaps it was just a one-time occurrence.' But now you've laughed

again, and there's nobody else here. Surely you are mocking me, or else you see something objectionable about me. Now I swear by God that you shall not come near me nor cling to me as you have formerly, until you tell me the real reason that you laughed." He spoke to her with love and respect to mollify her, "Say no more, my beloved, for I cannot tell you this secret." The woman said, "I have sworn in truth that you will not see my face again until you tell me the truth." The man said, "I know for certain that if I tell you this thing, I will die." She replied, "I swear by my life that I will neither eat nor drink until I persuade you. And I will do it." The man said, "Behold, I give my life as your redemption /from the oath/. I choose to die rather than let one hair of yours fall to the ground. For what desire have I in my house beyond you? Now give me a little time to prepare myself and get things in order and leave orders for my estate. Afterwards I will tell you whatever you demand." Then he summoned all his friends and relatives to leave instructions with them.

Now in his house he had a dog, and by its side there was a left-over loaf of bread and some fatty meat. But it had no desire to eat because of its concern over the impending death of its master. Along came the rooster of the house, and it took the bread along with the meat and it, together with its wives, ate these goodies. Nothing was lacking. And the dog rose up against it like a lion, and said to it, "You heartless villain! How great is your insolence! How minute is your humility! Your master is one step from death and you eat and rejoice in his tents and are not concerned for him!" The rooster replied, "If your master is a simpleton and a fool, what can I do about it? Do I not have ten wives over whom I rule according to my wish and desire? Not one of them rebels against my command. Your master has only one wife, and he cannot rule over her and subdue her and discipline her as is just." So the rooster opened his mouth and said,

Caught in a net by a woman;
Is there anything as harmful as
a woman who rules over a man?
Incline your ear and hearken to the
voice of instruction,
And know and learn understanding from
the pronouncement of a man /i.e.,
the rooster/.

The dog asked, "So what should he do?
The rooster said, "If he would take a thick stick and give her a hard blow, I will be a faithful guarantor that she would beg him not to tell her everything all the time."

The man heard this and did so, and was saved.⁸

Solomon answered queries of all sorts -- questions of ethics and halacha, metaphysical inquiries, and mere riddles. The following midrash gives an example of the first sort:

R. Abahu said: Solomon the son of David was asked, How great is the power of charity / *חַסְדִּי*? He answered, "Go and see what my father David said on the subject" -- HE /the God-fearing man/ HATH SCATTERED ABROAD, HE HATH GIVEN TO THE NEEDY; HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS / *צְדִקָּתוֹ*, here understood as "his charity"/ ENDURETH FOREVER; HIS HORN SHALL BE EXALTED IN HONOR (Ps. 112:9)....And Solomon was asked, Who will attain everlasting life? He replied, "Everyone who 'shows honor to his elders'" /a paraphrase of Is. 24:23/.⁹

The next midrash gives an example of the second sort of question:

"Now I have said that when the second spirit prevails over the first, the latter deserts the body. But whither goeth it? What becomes of it? Old man, old man, what hast thou done? Thou didst intend to speak but little, and hast come as far as this! Thou hast entered a place into which no other human being has hitherto entered since the time of Doeg and Ahitophel, when four hundred questions were asked concerning a tower which was suspended in the air, and which no one could answer until Solomon came and made everything clear.¹⁰

The most famous foreign dignitary to visit Solomon's court was the Queen of Sheba, who came to test his wisdom with riddles (I Kings 10:1-13). The midrashim relating to her visit and her questions are discussed in Chapter 10, pp. 267-72.

8. Ben Ha-melech Veba-nazir, pp. 161-165.

9. Baba Batra 10b.

10. Zohar, Shemot 102a (Soncino III, p. 311). See Sanhedrin 106b.

For the rabbis, of course, the highest sort of wisdom was the wisdom of Torah. Since Solomon was the wisest of men, he must have been a great student of Torah, they reasoned. And they proved their assertion from the Bible itself.

Knowledge of Torah is the highest kind of knowledge, so Solomon must have had access to the highest sources of knowledge:

Said R. Nehemiah: Blessed is he who is worthy to perceive such singing /of the angels/, for... he who is deemed worthy to comprehend this song becomes adept in doctrine and obtains wit to discern what has been and what will be. Solomon was found worthy of such knowledge....Solomon... was gifted with a still greater knowledge of that song /than was David/: he penetrated into the essence of wisdom, and so he wrote many proverbs and made a book of the song itself. This is the meaning of his words, I GOT ME MEN SINGERS /שָׂרֵי טוֹב/ AND WOMEN SINGERS (Eccl. 2:8); that is to say, he acquired the knowledge of the hymn sung by heavenly and terrestrial beings. And on account of this he called his book "The Song of Songs": the song of the supernal songs, the song containing all mysteries of the Torah and of Divine wisdom; the song wherein is power to penetrate into things that were and things that will be; the song sung by the supernal princes /שָׂרֵי טוֹב/.¹

Another midrash offers a related explanation of Solomon's transcendent wisdom:

UNTO ITHIEL /לִיאֲתִיֵּאל/ (Prov. 30:1) means that Solomon understood the letters of God /אֲלֹהִים עֲלֵה/ . Another interpretation is that he understood the letters of the ministering angels.²

Apparently, Solomon did not acquire his knowledge of Torah at the same time that he received his other wisdom. In I Kings 3, Solomon re-

1. Zohar, Shemot 18b (Soncino III, pp. 59-60). The Song of Songs and its relation to all of Torah is discussed in Chapter 7, pp. 189ff.

2. Midrash Mishle 30 (beginning).

ceived wisdom immediately, in his dream. But his knowledge of Torah did not come so easily:

The large "mem" with which מנצח (Prov. 1:1) is written teaches that Solomon fasted for forty days / מנצח /, that the wisdom of Torah might be given to him as it was to Moses, as it is written, AND /Moses/ WAS THERE WITH THE LORD FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS (Ex. 34:28).³

In other midrashim as well, Solomon's wisdom was distinguished from his knowledge and observance of Torah. In one instance, God made His gift of wisdom and all other good things conditional upon Solomon's observance of Torah:

THOU /God/ HAST APPOINTED HIS BOUNDS /תקן/ THAT HE CANNOT PASS (Job 14:5). So I /God/ said to Solomon when he requested wisdom. What did I tell him? "AND I HAVE ALSO GIVEN THEE THAT WHICH THOU HAST NOT ASKED, BOTH RICHES AND HONOR (I Kings 3:13). If you will observe the Torah and the statutes /והחוקים/, the angel of death shall not touch you, as it is said, AND IF THOU WILT WALK IN MY WAYS, TO KEEP MY STATUTES /תקן/ AND MY COMMANDMENTS, AS THY FATHER DAVID DID WALK, THEN I WILL LENGTHEN THY DAYS (*ibid.* 14)." /Thus, the Job verse should be read, "You have appointed his statutes, that he should not pass away."/⁴

In another instance, however, Solomon's wisdom precedes, and is a necessary precondition for, his knowledge of Torah:

THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS SOLOMON'S (Song 1:1). This teaches that Solomon's wisdom was equal in importance to the Torah....Whence do we know that wisdom is just as important as Torah? It is said, BUT THE FOOLISH DESPISE WISDOM AND DISCIPLINE /מוסר/ (Prov. 1:7); and מוסר means Torah, as it is said, HEAR, MY SON, THE INSTRUCTION /מוסר/ OF THY FATHER, AND FORESAKE NOT THE TEACHING /תורת/ OF THY MOTHER (*ibid.* 8). Not only that, but wisdom

3. Yalkut Shim'oni, Prov. 1, section 929, p. 485b.

4. Tanhuma, Behukotai 1; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 3, section 175, p. 373b.

precedes Torah, as it is said, THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM /חֵלֶם וְיִרְאָה/ IS THE FEAR OF THE LORD /or, "Wisdom is prior to the fear of the Lord"/ (Ps. 111:10). R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Without wisdom there is no Torah. If one does not fear sin, one cannot uphold the Torah. We know this because Solomon's wisdom was prior /to his knowledge of Torah/, as the text says of him, AND SOLOMON LOVED THE LORD (I Kings 3:3), because Solomon's wisdom was a gift to him.⁵

But elsewhere, wisdom and Torah are equated:

I SEARCHED IN MY HEART HOW TO PAMPER MY FLESH WITH WINE (Eccl. 2:3). Solomon said, "I searched in my heart to pamper my flesh with the wine of Torah." AND, MY HEART CONDUCTING ITSELF WITH WISDOM (*ibid.*) means, "guiding itself with the wisdom of Torah." HOW YET TO LAY HOLD ON FOLLY /חֵלֶם וְיִרְאָה/ (*ibid.*) means, according to R. Yudan in the name of R. Aha, "to lay hold on wisdom /חֵלֶם וְיִרְאָה/."⁶

We know that Solomon engaged in discussion of Torah, as in his explication of various matters pertaining to trees and animals (see above, pp.153f). Another source tells us that Solomon discussed matters of Torah with his Sanhedrin.⁷ But he won special approval from the rabbis because, they said, he taught Torah to others:

AND /Solomon/ CAME TO JERUSALEM, AND STOOD BEFORE THE ARK OF THE COVENANT OF THE LORD, AND OFFERED UP BURNT-OFFERINGS, AND OFFERED PEACE-OFFERINGS, AND MADE A FEAST TO ALL HIS SERVANTS (I Kings 3:15). R. Eleazar said: From here we learn that we should make a feast upon the completion of Torah. R. Yudan said: This teaches that whoever teaches Torah in public merits having the Holy Spirit rest upon him. Solomon did so: he taught /Torah/, and the Holy Spirit rested upon him, and he uttered three

5. Midrash Zuta, Shir Ha-shirim, p. 4; Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 5, lines 20-28; Midrash Mishle 1:1.

6. Kohelet Rabbah 2:5.

7. Ruth Rabbah 2:2. See also below, p. 172.

books -- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.⁸

Solomon used his superior wisdom to explicate the mysteries of Torah to others:

Solomon /is one of three people who/ said נִסְחָה הַגִּבּוֹר /"the pronouncement of the man"/. His strength /גִּבּוֹר/ was his ability to pour forth wisdom from his own understanding, as it is said, THEN I SAW THAT WISDOM EXCELLETH FOLLY (Eccl. 2:13). Not only that, but he also set fences around wisdom, to keep others from going astray from its paths. There is a parable about a deep well, from which no one could drink. Along came a clever fellow who tied together some ropes and some bands, and then drew water from it and drank. The Torah can be compared to a deep well. A person has to make ropes and chains to draw from it, as it is said, COUNSEL IN THE HEART OF MAN IS LIKE DEEP WATER; BUT A MAN OF UNDERSTANDING WILL DRAW IT OUT (Prov. 20:5). /The implication is that Solomon was such a man. Several more parables follow, comparing Torah to something inaccessible, which wise men bring within reach. The last one makes explicit the connection with Solomon:/ To what else is the Torah similar? To a jumbled heap of gems and jewels, with which no one knew what to do. Along came a clever fellow who matched up each stone with one similar to it, and thus made them all beautiful. Solomon did similarly. He sorted out the words of Torah and made them all very beautiful. So he said, A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN SETTINGS OF SILVER (Prov. 25:11).⁹

And his teaching had positive results:

AT THY RIGHT HAND DOTH STAND THE QUEEN / שֶׁגֶל / (Ps. 45:10). Because /Solomon/ caused Israel to love Torah, as the nations of the world love concubines / שֶׁגֶל /, he merited the

8. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:9.

9. Mishnat R. Eliezer 7, pp. 132-134.

GOLD OF OPHIR (ibid.).¹⁰

According to many midrashim, however, Solomon's knowledge of Torah waned at some point in his life. These midrashim, along with others which points to the limits of Solomon's wisdom in general, are discussed in the following section.

10. Midrash Tehillim 45:6.

As great a scholar as Solomon was, some mysteries of the Torah were too great for him:

HOW GREAT ARE THY WORKS, O LORD! THY THOUGHTS ARE VERY DEEP (Ps. 92:6). HOW GREAT ARE THY WORKS, O LORD refers to the work of Creation, which was the work of the Holy One, blessed be He. THY THOUGHTS ARE VERY DEEP refers to the mysteries of Torah. R. Eliezer the Elder said: It is written, AND THE LORD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM, AS HE PROMISED HIM (I Kings 5:26). This teaches that Solomon understood the fine points of Torah, but its depths he did not understand. And when he sought to comprehend them, he said, I SAID: "I WILL GET WISDOM"; BUT IT WAS FAR FROM ME (Eccl. 7:23).¹

The rabbis gave specific examples of mysteries too deep for Solomon, and, we may assume, too deep for the rabbis as well. The outstanding example was the red heifer (Nu. 19:2-10):

THIS IS THE STATUTE OF THE LAW, etc. (Nu. 19:2). R. Isaac began his discourse, ALL THIS HAVE I TRIED BY WISDOM; I SAID: "I WILL GET WISDOM"; BUT IT WAS FAR FROM ME (Eccl. 7:23). /The midrash then extols Solomon's wisdom, as recounted in previous sections. But it concludes,/ Solomon said, "I have comprehended all these /difficult matters/, but the section about the red heifer I searched and inquired and examined -- I SAID: 'I WILL GET WISDOM'; BUT IT WAS FAR FROM ME."²

But there were other mysteries of Torah which stumped Solomon as well:

In spite of all the wisdom which was ascribed to Solomon -- as it is said, WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IS GRANTED UNTO THEE (II Chron. 1:12), and AND SOLOMON'S WISDOM EXCELLED....FOR HE WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN (I Kings 5:10-11) -- he was baffled

-
1. Zohar Hadash 7.
 2. Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3; Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3; Pesikta Rabbati 14, pp. 58b-61b; Tanhuma, Hukat 6; Tanhuma Buber, Hukat 10-15; Kohelet Rabbah 7:44; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 5, section 178, p. 374a.

concerning the four species /of Sukkot/. It is said, THERE ARE THREE THINGS WHICH ARE TOO WONDERFUL FOR ME (Prov. 30:18), meaning the paschal lamb, the matzah and the maror; YEA, FOUR WHICH I KNOW NOT (*ibid.*), meaning the four species, which he sought to understand. THE FRUIT OF GOODLY TREES (Lev. 23:40) -- who's to say that it is the etrog? All trees produce good fruit. BRANCHES OF PALM-TREES (*ibid.*)-- here the Torah says to take two palm branches with which to do praise, but the lulav uses the heart of the palm. BOUGHES OF THICK TREES (*ibid.*) -- who's to say that it is the myrtle? In fact, in another place, it says, GO FORTH UNTO THE MOUNT, AND FETCH OLIVE BRANCHES, AND BRANCHES OF WILD OLIVE, AND MYRTLE BRANCHES, AND PALM BRANCHES, AND BRANCHES OF THICK TREES, TO MAKE BOOTHS (Neh. 8:15). WILLOWS OF THE BROOK (Lev. 23:40) -- all trees grow in water. YEA, FOUR WHICH I KNOW NOT -- he alluded to them another time: THERE ARE THREE THINGS WHICH ARE STATELY IN THEIR MARCH, YEA, FOUR WHICH ARE STATELY IN GOING (Prov. 30:29). These are the four species which every person of Israel runs to take in order to praise the Holy One, blessed be He. They seem small to mankind, but they are great in the view of the Holy One, blessed be He. And who explained to Israel that these four species are the etrog, lulav, myrtle and willow? The Sages /ע"א ד"א/, as it is said, /THERE ARE FOUR THINGS WHICH ARE LITTLE UPON THE EARTH/, BUT THEY ARE EXCEEDING WISE /ע"א ד"א ד"א ד"א ד"א/ (Prov. 30:24).³

We know that Solomon conferred with his Sanhedrin in matters of Torah (above, page 168). He even deferred to their greater wisdom, again revealing that even his wisdom had limits. One occasion was the death of his father:

David died on Atzeret / Shavuot/, which fell on Shabbat. The Sanhedrin went to present itself before Solomon. He asked them, "Can he be moved from place to place /because David was lying in the sun/?" They replied, "Is it not taught that /on Shabbat/ one may cover the body and wash it, so long as no limb is

3. Vayikra Rabbah 30:15.

moved." He said, "The dogs of my father's house are hungry." They replied, "Is it not taught that /on Shabbat/ one may cut up cucumbers for cattle or a carcass for the dogs." So he took a curtain and spread it over David so that the sun wouldn't beat down on his body. Some say he summoned an eagle which spread its wings over him to keep the sun from beating down.⁴

But even after assuming the throne, Solomon regularly deferred to the wisdom of others:

Whence do we know that one should take counsel with ten elders? It is said, WISDOM IS A STRONGHOLD TO THE WISE MORE THAN TEN RULERS /חֹכְמָה בְּיָדֵי עֲשָׂרָה מְלָכִים, here understood as "from ten rulers"/ THAT ARE IN A CITY (Eccl. 7:19). In the days of Solomon, when Solomon would intercalate the year, he would bring in seven elders before him, as it is said, THE SLUGGARD IS WISER IN HIS OWN EYES /חֹכְמָה עֵינֵי הַשֹּׁמֵר, here understood as "a wise man is a sluggard in his own eyes"/ THAN SEVEN MEN THAT GIVE WISE ANSWER (Prov. 26:16). What does חֹכְמָה עֵינֵי הַשֹּׁמֵר mean? It means that Solomon would keep silent in the presence of one greater than he, and so he said, WHEN THOU SITTEST TO EAT WITH A RULER, CONSIDER WELL HIM THAT IS BEFORE THEE; AND PUT A KNIFE TO THY THROAT, IF THOU BE A MAN GIVEN TO APPETITE (Prov. 23:1-2). Along with Solomon and the seven elders there would be Nathan the prophet and Gad the visionary, making a total of ten.⁵

Solomon's wisdom was limited not only in matters of Torah, but in other matters as well. One midrash lists several mysteries which Solomon was never privileged to understand:

KOHELET SOUGHT TO FIND OUT WORDS OF DELIGHT (Eccl. 12:10). Solomon sought to comprehend the matter of the red heifer; as R. Isaac said, "The clothes of all who prepare the red heifer become impure, but the heifer itself makes pure those who are impure!" But the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "IT IS WRITTEN UPRIGHTLY /יָשָׁר/ EVEN WORDS OF TRUTH (ibid.). I have already written for you in books of honesty /יָשָׁר/, as it is said, IS NOT THIS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF JASHAR /סֵפֶר יָשָׁר/ (Josh. 10:13). Act honestly,

4. Ruth Rabbah 3:2; Kohelet Rabbah 5:13.

5. Shemot Rabbah 19:20.

sincerely and in faith. I have issued a decree, I have ordained a statute; it is not for you to seek the reasons behind it. Thus it is said, THIS / תָּוֹרָה / IS THE STATUTE OF THE LAW /... THAT THEY BRING A RED HEIFER/ (Nu. 19:2)." What does תָּוֹרָה mean? It signifies that the red heifer is to be distinguished from the heifer which is beheaded /to atone for an unsolved murder; Deut. 21:1-9/. Solomon also sought to comprehend the giving of reward for observing the Torah, as it is said, SHE/wisdom = Torah/ IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN RUBIES; AND ALL THE THINGS THOU CANST DESIRE ARE NOT TO BE COMPARED UNTO HER (Prov. 3:15). But the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "IT IS WRITTEN UPRIGHTLY /יָשָׁר/, EVEN WORDS OF TRUTH. I have already written for you in a book of honesty /יָשָׁר/, NEITHER HATH THE EYE SEEN A GOD BESIDE THEE, WHO WORKETH FOR HIM THAT WAITETH FOR HIM (Is. 64:3)." Solomon also sought to comprehend the giving of reward to the righteous, as it is said, FOR YE /the righteous/ SHALL BE /in/ A DELIGHTSOME LAND (Mal. 3:12). But the end of the matter is, OH HOW ABUNDANT IS THY GOODNESS, WHICH THOU HAST LAID UP /סִתְּוָה, "hidden"/ FOR THEM THAT FEAR THEE (Ps. 31:20). Solomon also sought to comprehend the giving of reward for observing the mitzvot, as it is written, FOR I DESIRE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE (Hosea 6:6). But the end of the matter is, KNOW THEREFORE THAT THE LORD THY GOD, HE IS GOD; THE FAITHFUL GOD, WHO KEEPETH COVENANT AND MERCY WITH THEM THAT LOVE HIM AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS /וְיִשְׁמְרוּ/ (Deut. 7:9). Solomon also sought to comprehend the end of the world, as it is said, THAT YE AWAKEN NOT, NOR STIR UP LOVE, UNTIL IT PLEASE (Song 2:7). But the end of the matter is, FOR THE DAY OF VENGEANCE IS IN MY HEART, AND MY YEAR OF REDEMPTION IS COMING (Is. 63:4). R. Samuel taught in the name of R. Judah: If someone tells you when the moment of final redemption is coming, don't believe him, because it is written, FOR THE DAY OF VENGEANCE IS IN MY HEART. If the heart does not reveal its secrets to the mouth, to whom can the mouth reveal those secrets? R. Berechiah and R. Simon said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: /God said,/ "I gave you three clues about the grave of Moses, as it is said, AND HE WAS BURIED IN THE VALLEY IN THE LAND OF MOAB OVER AGAINST BETH-PEOR (Deut. 34:6). But in the end, NO MAN KNOWETH OF HIS SEPULCHRE UNTO THIS DAY (ibid.). If no creature can comprehend a matter about which I gave you more than one clue, how much the less can you comprehend the end of the world, about which it is said, FOR THE /matter is/ SHUT UP AND SEALED TILL THE TIME OF THE END (Dan. 12:9)."6

6. Midrash Tehillim 9:2; Kohelet Rabbah 12:10.

The end of the midrash makes it clear that Solomon's failure to penetrate these mysteries is presented as a warning to us, who do not even approach Solomon in wisdom, not to weary ourselves in a search for answers to questions which are ultimately beyond human understanding.

This list of Solomon's futile requests omits one item that we read above, page 132. Solomon also requested the ability to judge without witnesses. Again God denied his request. As noted above, Solomon's example serves there also as a caution to later jurists not to violate strict rules of evidence.

In legend, too, Solomon discovers the limits of his wisdom when he confronts the workings of God. The two legends which follow preach similar fatalistic lessons:

Solomon had a very beautiful daughter, unmatched for beauty in all the land of Israel. Solomon looked at the stars to discover who her mate would be, and he saw that the man would be the poorest of all in Israel. What did he do? He built a high tower in the sea, with water all around it. He took his daughter and placed her in the tower, and he left with her seventy eunuchs from among the elders of Israel. There were no openings in the tower; no man could enter it. He stored lots of provisions there. Then he said, "Now I shall see the workings of God." In due time, the poor man who was her destined mate was out on the road at night. He was naked and bare-foot, hungry and thirsty, with nothing on which he might lie down. He saw the carcass of an ox cast aside in a field. So he crawled inside the bones of the carcass to escape the cold. He fell asleep. Along came a great bird and snatched up the carcass and carried it to the roof of the tower, above the room of the girl. There the bird ate the meat of the carcass. It remained there on the roof until daybreak. The girl came out of her room to go up to the roof as was her custom every day. There she saw the young man. She asked him, "Who are you, and who brought you here?" He replied, "I am a Jew from Acco. In truth, a bird brought me here." What did she do? She took him and brought him into her room and clothed him and

washed him and anointed him, and he became very beautiful, so much so that there was none as handsome in all the borders of Israel. The girl loved him heart and soul; her soul was bound to his. The young man was extremely bright and a scribe. One day she asked him, "Do you wish to marry me?" He answered, "Would that I could!" What did he do? He drew out his own blood and wrote her a marriage contract and a dowry with his own blood, and married her. He said, "The Lord is a witness today, and Michael and Gabriel are witnesses." Then he cohabited with her and she became pregnant. When the elders saw that she was pregnant; they said to her, "It appears to us that you are pregnant." "Yes," she replied. "From whom?" they asked. "What's it to you?" she answered. The elders were dismayed because they feared that Solomon would blame them for foul play, so they sent to him that he should come talk with them. Solomon came out in a boat. They said to him, "Our lord the king, this is the situation. Let our lord not accuse his servants of sin." When he heard all this, he summoned his daughter and asked her about the matter. She told him, "The Holy One, blessed be He, has brought me a young man, handsome and good, a scholar and a scribe, and he has married me." She called to the young man and he came before the king and showed him the marriage contract which he had made for his daughter. The king asked him about his father and his mother and his family, from which city he came, and he understood from his replies that he was the same one whom Solomon had seen in the stars. Then he rejoiced in extreme happiness and said, "Praised is God Who provides for man and causes the lonely to dwell in their own homes; Who with strength sets free the captives."⁷

While this fairy tale reassures us that Providence will bring us our own prince or princess, another folk-tale reminds us that Providence has a deadly side to it as well:

R. Johanan stated: A man's feet are responsible for him; they lead him to the place where he is wanted /by Death/. There were once two Cushites who attended on Solomon, and these were ELIHOREPH

7. Tanhuma Buber, Introduction 42, p. 136.

AND AHYAH, THE SONS OF SHISHA, SCRIBES (I Kings 4:3), of Solomon. One day Solomon observed that the Angel of Death was sad. "Why," he said to him, "art thou sad?" "Because," he answered him, "they /in heaven/ have demanded from me the two Cushites who sit here." /Solomon thereupon/ gave them in charge of the spirits and sent them to the district of Luz /to save them from death/. When, however, they reached the district of Luz they died. On the following day /Solomon/ observed that the Angel of Death was in cheerful spirits. "Why," he said to him, "art thou cheerful?" "To the place," the other replied, "where they expected them from me, thither didst thou send them!" Solomon thereupon uttered the saying, "A man's feet are responsible for him; they lead him to the place where he is wanted."⁸

Solomon himself acknowledged the limits of his wisdom:

SURELY I AM BRUTISH, UNLIKE A MAN, AND HAVE NOT THE UNDERSTANDING OF A MAN (Prov. 30:2). Is it possible that one of whom it is written, FOR HE WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN (I Kings 5:11), could say, SURELY I AM BRUTISH, UNLIKE A MAN? But actually he said this out of humility, because before the Holy One, blessed be He, no man is wise. R. Levi said: Whenever the early sages spoke of their wisdom, they attributed it to the true Possessor of wisdom. Joseph said, DO NOT INTERPRETATIONS BELONG TO GOD? (Gen. 40:8). Likewise Jeremiah said, AH, LORD GOD! BEHOLD, I KNOW NOT HOW TO SPEAK (Jer. 1:6). And Daniel said, BUT AS FOR ME, THIS SECRET IS NOT REVEALED TO ME FOR ANY WISDOM THAT I HAVE MORE THAN ANY LIVING (Dan. 2:30). And so too Solomon said, SURELY I AM BRUTISH, UNLIKE A MAN.⁹

Even at its height, then, Solomon's wisdom had its limits. But his wisdom did not remain at its peak throughout his life. Rather, it waxed and waned:

There were three periods to Solomon's life. R.

8. Sukkah 53a (Soncino, pp. 253-4). In Y. Kil'ayim 32c, Solomon places the scribes in mid-air by pronouncing the Divine Name. The Angel of Death then exults that God put this idea into Solomon's head, enabling him to accomplish his mission.

9. Mishnat R. Eliezer 10 (beginning), p. 181.

Yudan said:....First he was wise, then he was foolish, and then wise again....What is the biblical support for this view? ALL THINGS HAVE I SEEN IN THE DAYS OF MY VANITY (Eccl. 7:15). No man recounts the travail and sorrow through which he has passed unless he returns to a state of happiness. But R. Oniah said:First he was foolish, then he was wise, and then foolish again....What is the biblical support for this view? I KOHELET WAS ONCE KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM (Eccl. 1:12).¹⁰

Solomon's knowledge of Torah seemed to undergo only two stages, growth and decline:

THE WORDS OF AGUR / אגור / THE SON OF JAKEH / יאקה / (Prov. 30:1). The name אגור means that Solomon /the reputed author of Proverbs/ heaped up / אגור / the words of Torah. The name אגור/spelled אגור in the midrash/ means that he vomited up / אגור / the Torah he had learned. Like a cup which is filled up and then is emptied, so Solomon first learned Torah and then forgot it.¹¹

But Solomon did retain some knowledge of Torah, says another midrash. Here R. Aha preaches a lesson about effective pedagogy:

ALSO / אגור / MY WISDOM STOOD ME IN STEAD (Eccl. 2:9). R. Aha said: Solomon said, "All the Torah which I still knew in my old age I learned through blows. Through anger / אגור / it remained with me."¹²

Quite clearly the rabbis intended to remind their listeners that no man is omniscient, and thus no one is entitled to boast of his wisdom or learning. Solomon, who symbolized human wisdom, was the perfect model from whom to learn the lesson of human limitations.

10. Kohelet Rabbah 1:32. This same midrash is discussed in Chapter 3, p. 80. See also Chapter 12, p. 285.

11. Kohelet Rabbah 1:2; 2:14.

12. Kohelet Rabbah 2:12.

FOR IN MUCH WISDOM IS MUCH VEXATION; AND HE THAT INCREASETH KNOWLEDGE INCREASETH SORROW (Eccl. 1:18). All the while that a person increases in wisdom, he increases in vexation, and all the while that he increases in knowledge, he increases in afflictions. Solomon said, "Because I increased in wisdom, I increased in vexation, and because I increased in knowledge, I increased in afflictions."¹

This midrash expresses the ambivalence that men have always felt about the possession of wisdom. It is clear in the myths of Adam and Eve, Prometheus and Oedipus. Solomon, the symbol of wisdom, must then have experienced in his life both its benefits and its drawbacks. This section seeks to present the pitfalls, and to determine their overall importance in an evaluation of Solomon's supreme wisdom.

The two-edged nature of Solomon's wisdom was particularly apparent in relation to his dealing with the demons:

See how King Solomon was caught in a trap, as it is said, HE TAKETH THE WISE IN THEIR OWN CRAFTINESS (Job 5:13). Solomon gained power over many spirits and demons and taught them all /God's/ justice. But in the end he was ensnared in his old age and he began to fear the spirits, as it is said, EVERY MAN /guarding Solomon's bed/ HATH HIS SWORD UPON HIS THIGH, BECAUSE OF DREAD IN THE NIGHT (Song 3:8). At first the spirits were terrified by Solomon, but in the end he was afraid of them.²

The problem with Solomon's wisdom, then, was that it led him into areas that were better left unexplored, such as the world of magic and demons. This same pitfall ensnared Solomon in regard to the prohibitions of the Torah:

R. Isaac said: Why were the reasons for

-
1. Midrash Shmu'el 7:3.
 2. Shemot Rabbah 30:16. For details of Solomon's relationship with the demons, see Chapter 3, section II, pp. 85-106.

the injunctions of the Torah not revealed? Because in two verses, the reasons were revealed, and the greatest /wisest/ person in the world stumbled into error because of them. It is written, /the king/ SHALL NOT MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF, THAT HIS HEART TURN NOT AWAY (Deut. 17:17). Solomon said, "I will multiply wives, but I will not turn away." But it is written, IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, THAT HIS WIVES TURNED AWAY HIS HEART AFTER OTHER GODS (I Kings 11:4). And it is written, HE SHALL NOT MULTIPLY HORSES TO HIMSELF, NOR CAUSE THE PEOPLE TO RETURN TO EGYPT, TO THE END THAT HE SHOULD MULTIPLY HORSES (Deut. 17:16). Solomon said, "I will multiply horses, but I will not cause the people to return to Egypt." But it is written, AND A CHARIOT CAME AND WENT OUT OF EGYPT FOR SIX HUNDRED SHEKELS OF SILVER (I Kings 10:29).³

In Chapter 2 , pp. 48ff, many other related midrashim detail the sins into which Solomon fell, particularly the sin of his foreign wives. Always the reason is implied or stated -- his wisdom led him astray. For his wisdom led Solomon to assume that he could delve into any area, even the violation of Torah, and succeed by his wits. That is, he became arrogant in his wisdom, for which he was punished by being temporarily deprived of the throne (see Chapter 2 , p. 51ff). This brings us back to the lesson of the previous section, namely, that man must recognize the limits of his wisdom.

One midrash sees Solomon's wisdom as neither an asset nor a liability, but rather as irrelevant to his worldly success or failure:

I RETURNED, AND SAW UNDER THE SUN, THAT THE RACE IS NOT TO THE SWIFT, NOR THE BATTLE TO THE STRONG, NEITHER YET BREAD TO THE WISE (Eccl. 9:11). This last phrase refers to Solomon, as it is said, FOR HE WAS WISER THAN ALL MEN (I Kings 5:11). But the Holy One, blessed be He, dethroned him, and an

3. Sanhedrin 21b.

angel had to prepare and bring him a loaf of bread and a bowl of beans every day. This is the meaning of NEITHER YET BREAD TO THE WISE.⁴

Of course, these midrashim were intended to caution against over-reliance on one's own wisdom. But wisdom itself remained the most highly prized human faculty. The great bulk of this chapter testifies to its worth and desirability. One midrash even implies that Solomon's wisdom saved him from perdition:

SEEST THOU A MAN DILIGENT IN HIS BUSINESS?
HE SHALL STAND BEFORE KINGS; HE SHALL NOT
STAND BEFORE MEAN MEN (Prov. 22:29). Note
well the wisdom of Solomon, who was diligent
in the work of the Holy One, blessed be He.
For he built the Temple in seven years, but
his own house he built in thirteen....So
when the Sanhedrin sought to include him
with the three kings and four commoners
/who have no share in the world to come/,
the Shechinah stood before the Holy One,
blessed be He, and said, "Lord of the worlds,
SEEST THOU A MAN DILIGENT IN HIS BUSINESS?
They want to include him among the mean
men." At that moment a heavenly voice went
forth and said to the Sanhedrin, HE SHALL
STAND BEFORE KINGS; HE SHALL NOT STAND BE-
FORE MEAN MEN.⁵

Solomon's wisdom, then, was for the most part beneficial. But the rabbis never forgot its potential for abuse. This last midrash makes both these points, in a comment on the verse with which this section began (Eccl. 1:18).

There are some who increased wisdom to their benefit, and some who did so to their harm. Moses and Solomon increased wisdom to their benefit; Doeg and Ahitophel did so to their harm.⁶

4. Tanhuma, Va'ethanan 2, p. 101; Kohelet Rabbah 9:11.

5. Midrash Mishle 22:29.

6. Kohelet Rabbah 1:18.

Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes are attributed to Solomon.

The rabbis viewed these books as results of the outpouring of his divinely-inspired wisdom. According to one midrash, the books were in fact the first manifestation of Solomon's wisdom:

THE HEART OF THE WISE TEACHETH HIS MOUTH (Prov. 16:23). The heart of a wise man is full of wisdom. What testifies to his understanding and wisdom? His mouth. His mouth testifies to his wisdom and makes it known.. ..This can be compared to a barrel which is full of gems and jewels and is tied shut with cord and placed in a corner. No one knows what's in it. Someone comes along and opens it, and then everyone knows what's inside. Likewise, Solomon's heart was full of wisdom, but no one knew what was in it. But when the Holy Spirit rested upon him and uttered the three books, then everyone recognized his wisdom.¹

According to this same midrash, Solomon merited the inspiration of the Holy Spirit because he occupied himself deeply in Torah: .

/THE HEART OF THE WISE.../ ADDETH LEARNING TO HIS LIPS (Prov. 16:23). When a wise man brings forth words of Torah from his heart, he adds to the lesson of Torah.../So/ Solomon added to the learning of Torah, as it is said, I APPLIED MY HEART TO SEEK AND TO SEARCH OUT BY WISDOM (Eccl. 1:13)....The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Solomon, "You have searched into the words of Torah. By your life, I shall not neglect your reward. I hereby cause the Holy Spirit to rest upon you." Immediately the Holy Spirit did rest upon him and he uttered these three books - Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.²

In another midrash, Solomon earned this reward because he taught Torah to others:

R. Yudan said: Anyone who teaches Torah in

1. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:7.

2. Ibid.

public merits having the Holy Spirit rest upon him. So it was with Solomon: he taught, and the Holy Spirit rested upon him and he uttered three books - Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.³

The fact that the Holy Spirit rested upon Solomon was proof that he had done something very meritorious indeed. The rabbis took it as a sign that God forgave Solomon for all his sins. This is expressed in several midrashim:

R. Joshua b. Levi said: When /the Men of the Great Assembly/ decreed that three evil kings and four evil commoners had no share in the world to come, they also sought to include Solomon among them. But a heavenly voice went forth and said, TOUCH NOT MINE ANOINTED ONES (Ps. 105:15)....R. Yudan b. Simon said: That's not all. The Holy Spirit also rested upon him and he uttered these three books -- Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes.⁴

Following a list of similarities between Solomon and his father, we read this:

R. Simon in the name of R. Jonathan of the school of Guvrin in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi said: If you're comparing them, you should compare them from all sides. Just as his father was forgiven for all his sins -- as it is said, THE LORD ALSO HATH PUT AWAY THY SIN; THOU SHALT NOT DIE (II Sam. 12:13) -- so likewise with /Solomon/. And not only that, but also the Holy Spirit rested upon him and he uttered three books -- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.⁵

And after a list of Solomon's sins, and God's anger about them, we read this:

But in his old age, as Solomon was close

3. Ibid. 1:8; 1:9; Kohelet Rabbah 1:1.

4. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:5.

5. Ibid. 1:6.

to his death, the Holy Spirit rested upon him and he uttered these three books -- Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes.⁶

This last midrash raises the issue of the time of the composition of the books. One midrash gives a detailed reply on the subject:

Solomon wrote three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Which of these did he write first? R. Hiyya the Great and R. Jonathan had differing opinions. R. Hiyya the Great said: He wrote Proverbs first, and then Song of Songs, and then Ecclesiastes. We can derive that from the verse, AND HE SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS (I Kings 5:12). This refers to the Book of Proverbs. AND HIS SONGS WERE A THOUSAND AND FIVE (*ibid.*) -- this refers to Song of Songs. And he uttered Ecclesiastes last. But the teaching of R. Hiyya the Great conflicts with the traditional teaching. R. Hiyya's teaching says that he wrote the three of them as one, and the traditional teaching says that he wrote each one separately. R. Hiyya the Great taught: In Solomon's old age the Holy Spirit rested upon him and he uttered three books -- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. R. Jonathan said: He wrote Song of Songs first, and then Proverbs, and then Ecclesiastes. R. Jonathan derives this from the way of the world. When a man is young he speaks words of song. When he is fully mature he speaks words of proverbs. When he grows old he speaks of life's vanities. R. Yannai the father-in-law of R. Ammi said: Everyone agrees at least that Ecclesiastes was written last.⁷

In the Zohar, R. Simeon b. Yohai also distinguishes the books, as did R. Jonathan, on the basis of their content:

King Solomon composed three books corresponding to three supernal attributes -- the Song

6. Seder Olam 15, p. 43.

7. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 5, section 179, p. 374b; Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 6; Midrash Zuta, Shir Ha-shirim, p. 5.

of Songs to Wisdom, Ecclesiastes to Understanding, and Proverbs to Knowledge.⁸

According to tradition, Solomon also wrote Psalm 30, "a Song at the Dedication of the /Temple/." It was the eighth of ten songs /שירי דוד/ recorded in the Bible.⁹ Consequently, Solomon is listed as one of ten people who contributed to the Book of Psalms.¹⁰

Solomon was, of course, a master of composition in whatever he wrote:

AND I APPLIED MY HEART TO SEEK AND TO SEARCH OUT /חָקַר/ WISDOM (Eccl. 1:13). One interpretation of חָקַר is to read it as חָקַר /"to leave over"/. When a poet composes a poem as an alphabetical acrostic, sometimes he completes it and sometimes he fails to complete it; but when Solomon composed an alphabetical acrostic he exceeded it by five letters. Thus it is written, AND HIS SONGS /שיריו/ WERE A THOUSAND /אָלף/ AND FIVE (I Kings 5:12), which means that he exceeded /שיריו/ his parable by five letters in addition to the alphabet /אָלף/.¹¹

And his writings were profound and rich in meanings:

AND HE SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS; AND HIS SONGS WERE A THOUSAND AND FIVE (I Kings 5:12). R. Samuel b. Nahman said: We have searched the whole Bible, but we have found that Solomon was inspired to utter no more than eight hundred verses /of proverbs/. And yet it says THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS. But this teaches

-
8. Zohar, Vayikra 64a (Soncino V, pp. 53-54).
 9. Mechilta, Ha-shirah 1, p. 116. For a discussion of the superscription of this psalm, which ascribes it to David, see Chapter 9, pp. 232ff.
 10. Midrash Tehillim 1:6. The list of ten is subject to some dispute in the Midrash. Midrash Tehillim excludes Jeduthun, mentioned in the superscription to Ps. 62. Baba Batra 14b-15a includes Jeduthun and Heman (Ps. 88:1) and excludes Solomon, leaving David to the side. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 4:3 includes Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon, leaving the other five open to debate.
 11. Kohelet Rabbah 1:33 (Soncino, p. 39).

that each and every verse which he was inspired to utter has two or three meanings, as it says, AS AN EAR-RING OF GOLD, AND AN ORNAMENT OF FINE GOLD. SO IS A WISE RE-PROVER UPON AN OBEDIENT EAR (Prov. 25:12). /The two similes give the verse two meanings./ But our masters said: Three thousand proverbs derive from each and every verse, and a thousand and five meanings apply to each and every proverb. For "Solomon's songs were a thousand and five" is not what's written here, but rather, "its songs," i.e., the meanings of each proverb.¹²

Still another reading of I Kings 5:12 proves that Solomon taught Torah through his writings:

R. Hammuna said: What is the meaning of the verse, AND HE SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS; AND HIS SONGS WERE A THOUSAND AND FIVE (I Kings 5:12)? It teaches that Solomon uttered three thousand proverbs about every word of Torah, and a thousand and five reasons for every word of the Scribes. Raba made this exposition: What is the meaning of the verse, AND BESIDES THAT KOHELET WAS WISE, HE ALSO TAUGHT THE PEOPLE KNOWLEDGE; YEA, HE PONDERED, AND SOUGHT OUT, AND SET IN ORDER MANY PROVERBS (Eccl. 12:9)? HE ALSO TAUGHT THE PEOPLE KNOWLEDGE implies that he taught it with notes of accentuation and illustrated it by simile. YEA, HE PONDERED / וַיִּבְחַן /, AND SOUGHT OUT, AND SET IN ORDER MANY PROVERBS -- Ulla said in the name of R. Eliezer: At first the Torah was like a basket which had no handles / בְּרִיקָה /, until ¹³ Solomon came along and made handles for it.

This idea finds its ultimate expression in the following midrash:

AND BESIDES THAT KOHELET WAS WISE, HE ALSO TAUGHT THE PEOPLE KNOWLEDGE; YEA, HE PONDERED, AND SOUGHT OUT, AND SET IN ORDER MANY PROVERBS (Eccl. 12:9). HE PONDERED the words

-
12. Pesikta deRav Kahana 4:3, p. 62 (Braude, p. 68); Pesikta Rabbati 14, pp. 60 a-b; Tanhuma, Hukat 6, p. 78a; Tanhuma Buber, Hukat 14, p. 111; Kohelet Rabbah 7:42; Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:11.
 13. Eruvin 21b (Soncino, p. 151); Yevamot 21a.

of Torah, AND SOUGHT OUT the words of Torah. He made handles for the Torah. You can conclude that until Solomon came along, there were no illustrations /of the meaning of Torah, such as Solomon's parables provided/. R. Nahman gave two /analogies to this situation/: It is like a large palace with many doors, and everyone who went in lost his way back to the entrance. Along came some clever person who took a spool of thread and laid down the thread going from the entrance. Then everyone could come and go with the use of the spool of thread. Similarly, until Solomon came along, no one could understand the words of Torah, but once he had come, everyone began to understand Torah. R. Nahman's second analogy was this: It is like a forest of reeds which no one could enter. Along came some clever person who took ascythe and cut them down. Then everyone could come and go through the mowed area. So too with Solomon. R. Yose said: It is like a big box full of fruit which had no handles, so no one could move it. Along came some clever person who made handles for it and began to move it by using the handles. Similarly, until Solomon came along, no one could understand the words of Torah, but once he had come, everyone began to understand Torah. R. Shiloh said: It is like a large pitcher full of boiling water which had no handles with which to move it. Along came some clever person who made a handle for it and so was able to move it by its handle. R. Hanina said: It is like a deep well full of cold, sweet, healthful water, but from which no creature could drink. Along came some clever person who connected rope to rope and cord to cord and drew water from it. Then everyone began to draw and drink. Similarly from word to work and from parable to parable Solomon mastered the secret of Torah, as it is written, THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON THE SON OF DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL (Prov. 1:1). Solomon's proverbs illumined the words of Torah. Our masters said: Don't be contemptuous of proverbs /or parables/, because by means of proverbs a person can comprehend the words of Torah. It is like a king who lost a gold coin or precious gem in his house. Would he not find it by means of a candle worth only an

issar /a copper coin/? Similarly, don't be contemptuous of parables, because by means of parables a person can comprehend the words of Torah. And be aware that by means of parables Solomon was able to comprehend the intricacies of Torah.¹⁴

Some doubt about the worth of Solomon's parables or proverbs is apparent also in the next midrash:

"The men of the Great Assembly...said..., 'Be moderate /בְּיָסוּר/ in judgment....'" This teaches that a person should be deliberate /בְּיָסוּר/ in judgment, since everyone who is deliberate in judgment is calm in judgment, as it is said, THESE ALSO ARE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, WHICH THE MEN OF HEZEKIAH KING OF JUDAH COPIED OUT /הַמִּנְחָה/ (Prov. 25:1). And הַמִּנְחָה/which can also mean "they were long in deliberating"/ means that they were deliberate /בְּיָסוּר/. Abba Saul said: הַמִּנְחָה means not that they were deliberate, but that they set these proverbs aside /בְּיָסוּר/, which is another possible meaning of הַמִּנְחָה/. Originally they said that Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes were hidden away, because they said the books were only proverbs and were not sacred writings. So they put them away until the men of the Great Assembly came along and set them aside. /The midrash then quotes Prov. 7:7-20, Song 7:11-12, and Eccl. 11:9 as reasons for excluding these books from the canon./ So they were not deliberate; rather, they set these books aside.¹⁵

Having considered Solomon's literary output as a whole, we will now specifically discuss midrashim related to each of his three books -- Proverbs (section II), Song of Songs (section III), and Ecclesiastes (section IV).

-
14. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:8. For a fuller discussion of Solomon as a teacher of Torah, see Chapter 6, pp. 168ff.
 15. Avot deRabbi Nathan, Nusha 1, Perek 1. The debate over the canonicity of Solomon's books, especially Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, is discussed further in sections III and IV below.

Most of the midrashim on verses from Solomon's books appear elsewhere in this work, since they relate directly to other topics. The remainder are collected in these next three sections. In each section, we will begin with midrashic statements about the respective book as a whole. Then we will quote the midrashim according to the order of the verses to which they relate. They are tied together by nothing so much as the fact that, in each case, Solomon is mentioned as their author. This section will deal with midrashim on verses from the book of Proverbs.

One midrash relating to a verse from Proverbs makes an observation about the book as a whole:

R. Simeon quoted the text: AS COLD WATERS TO A THIRSTY SOUL, SO IS GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY (Prov. 25:25). "King Solomon," he said, "composed three books corresponding to three supernal attributes -- the Song of Song to Wisdom, Ecclesiastes to Understanding, and Proverbs to Knowledge. Why does Proverbs correspond to Knowledge? Because all its verses are in parallel form, one half balancing the other, and when we examine them we find that they can be placed in either order. Thus here we have two things, 'cold waters' and a 'good report', either of which may be compared to the other as a source of comfort and refreshment."¹

In Proverbs 1:22, Solomon commented on mockery:

R. Yudan said: Two people were inspired to speak of mockery -- Solomon and Isaiah. Solomon said, HOW LONG WILL SCORNERS TAKE DELIGHT IN SCORNING? (Prov. 1:22). Isaiah said, NOW THEREFORE BE YE NOT SCOFFERS, LEST YOUR BANDS BE MADE STRONG (Is. 28:22).²

Solomon also tried to instruct the lazy in Prov. 6:6-11 (see Chapter 6 , pp. 155f). One midrash collects all of Solomon's

1. Zohar, Vayikra 64a (Soncino V, pp. 53-54).

2. Pesikta deRav Kahana 13:2.

advice to the lazy, and evaluates it:

Our masters said: Solomon said seven things about the lazy person, but what Moses said was greater than all of them. How is that? They said to the sluggard, "Your teacher is in the city, go and learn Torah from him." And he replied, "I am afraid of the lion along the road." Whence do we know this? It is said, THE SLUGGARD SAITH: "THERE IS A LION IN THE WAY" (Prov. 26:13). They said to him, "Look, your teacher is in the region. Get up and go to him." He replied, "I am afraid that there will be a lion in the streets," as it is said, "YEA, A LION IS IN THE STREETS" (*ibid.*). They said to him, "Look /your teacher/ is staying near your house." He replied, "But the lion is outside," as it is said, THE SLUGGARD SAITH: "THERE IS A LION WITHOUT" (Prov. 22:13). They said to him, "/Your teacher is/ within your house." He replied, "And what if I go and find the door locked? I must return!?" They told him, "The door is open." Whence do we know this? It is said, THE DOOR IS TURNING UPON ITS HINGES, AND THE SLUGGARD IS STILL UPON HIS BED (Prov. 26:14). Finally, when he didn't know what to say to them, he said, "Whether the door is open or locked, I want to sleep a little longer." Whence do we know this? It is said, HOW LONG WILT THOU SLEEP, O SLUGGARD, etc. (Prov. 6:9). He arose from his sleep in the morning, and they gave him food, and he was lazy about putting it into his mouth. Whence do we know? It is said, THE SLUGGARD BURIETH HIS HAND IN THE DISH; IT WEARIETH HIM TO BRING IT BACK TO HIS MOUTH (Prov. 26:15). And what is the seventh comment? THE SLUGGARD WILL NOT PLOW WHEN WINTER SETTETH IN; THEREFORE HE SHALL BEG IN HARVEST AND HAVE NOTHING (Prov. 20:4). What is the meaning of THE SLUGGARD WILL NOT PLOW, WHEN WINTER SETTETH IN? R. Simeon b. Yohai said: This means that he does not learn Torah in his youth, and he seeks to learn in his old age but is not able, which is the meaning of THEREFORE HE SHALL BEG IN HARVEST, AND HAVE NOTHING. But what Moses said was greater than all these. What was that? BUT THE WORD IS VERY NIGH UNTO THEE, IN THY MOUTH, AND IN THY HEART, THAT THOU MAYEST DO IT (Deut. 30:14) -- bring forth the word from your own mouth.³

3. Devarim Rabbah 5:6.

Prov. 6:6-8 sparked some scientific interest among the rabbis:

Why was /R. Simeon b. Halafta/ called an experimenter? R. Mesharsheya said: It is written, GO TO THE ANT, THOU SLUGGARD; CONSIDER HER WAYS, AND BE WISE; WHICH HAVING NO CHIEF, OVERSEER, OR RULER, PROVIDETH HER BREAD IN THE SUMMER (Prov. 6:6-8). /R. Simeon b. Halafta/ said, "I shall go and find out whether it is true that they have no king." He went at the summer solstice, and spread his coat over an ant-hill. When one /ant/ came out he marked it, and it immediately entered and informed the others that shadows had fallen, whereupon they all came forth. He then removed his coat and the sun beat down upon them. Thereupon they set upon this ant and killed it. He then said, "It is clear that they have no king, for otherwise they would surely have required to obtain royal sanction /to kill the ant/." R. Aha, son of Raba, said to R. Ashi, "But perhaps the king was with them, or they had royal authority, or it was during an interregnum /when they were under no law/, as it is written, IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL; EVERY MAN DID THAT WHICH WAS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES (Jud. 17:6)! Rather must you take the word of Solomon for it."⁴

Prov. 10:6 is actually an allusion to Patriarchal history, according to another midrash:

AND JACOB SENT MESSENGERS BEFORE HIM TO ESAU HIS BROTHER (Gen. 32:4). This is what the Holy Spirit referred to when it said through Solomon, BLESSINGS ARE UPON THE HEAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS, BUT THE MOUTH OF THE WICKED CONCEALETH VIOLENCE (Prov. 10:6). He uttered this verse about none other than Jacob and Esau. BLESSINGS ARE UPON THE HEAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS refers to Jacob; BUT THE MOUTH OF THE WICKED CONCEALETH VIOLENCE refers to Esau the wicked.⁵

Prov. 12:25 is quoted in support of Ben Sira's bid for canonicity:

If /one is forbidden to read Ben Sira/ because of the following: "Let not anxiety enter thy

4. Hullin 57b (Soncino, p. 316).

5. Bereshit Rabbah 75:8.

heart, for it has slain many a person!" But Solomon said likewise, ANXIETY IN THE HEART OF MAN MAKETH IT STOOP (Prov. 12:25).⁶

Solomon offers advice to judges in Prov. 24:23:

THESE ALSO ARE SAYINGS OF THE WISE. TO HAVE RESPECT OF PERSONS IN JUDGMENT IS NOT GOOD. How is that? If a person is a litigant and is wealthy, do not favor him on account of his wealth, for everyone will curse you and say, "Woe to him who forfeited his life by favoring a person because of his wealth."⁷

Solomon gave the Evil Impulse one of its seven names:

Solomon called it "enemy", as it is said, IF THINE ENEMY BE HUNGRY, GIVE HIM BREAD TO EAT, AND IF HE BE THIRSTY, GIVE HIM WATER TO DRINK; FOR THOU WILT HEAP COALS OF FIRE UPON HIS HEAD, AND THE LORD WILL REWARD THEE (Prov. 25:21-22). Read not "will reward thee" / *וְיִשְׁכְּרֶנּוּ* /, but rather "will make it acquiesce to you" / *וְיִשְׁכְּרֶנּוּ* /.⁸

The "woman of valor" passage (Prov. 31:10-31) provoked widely variant comments. One midrash identifies the twenty-two righteous women of the world with those praised by Solomon in that passage.⁹ Prov. 31:23 proved another point, that God sat in on the deliberations of the Sanhedrin:

We have learned that the Sanhedrin would form a semicircle so that they could see each other. And Solomon said, "I have seen /God/ contracted among them," as it is written, HER HUSBAND IS KNOWN IN THE GATES, WHEN HE SITTETH AMONG THE ELDERS OF THE LAND (Prov. 31:23).¹⁰

And another midrash even applied one description of the woman of

-
6. Sanhedrin 100b (Soncino, p. 681).
 7. Midrash Mishle 24, p. 36a.
 8. Sukkah 52a.
 9. Midrash Ha-gadol, Bereshit 334-5.
 10. Kohelet Rabbah 1:30.

valor to a man:

SHE OPENETH HER MOUTH WITH WISDOM; AND THE LAW
OF KINDNESS IS ON HER TONGUE (Prov. 31:26).
About whom did Solomon say this verse? He
said it about none other than David his father,
who lived in five worlds and uttered a song
/in each one/.¹¹

11. Berachot 10a.

The Song of Songs sparked some controversy among the Tannaim over its canonicity. Its content does not immediately recommend it as a divine utterance. But ultimately it was justified and even glorified. Along with Ecclesiastes, its canonicity was debated in the Mishnah:

Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes make the hands impure /i.e., are holy writings, part of the canon/. R. Judah said: Song of Songs makes the hands impure, but there is disagreement about Ecclesiastes. R. Jose said: Ecclesiastes does not make the hands impure, and there is disagreement about Song of Songs. R. Simeon said: Concerning Ecclesiastes, Beit Shammai was lenient /including it in the canon/ and Beit Hillel was strict. R. Simeon b. Azzi said: I have received a traditional teaching from the seventy-two elders that on the day when they installed R. Eleazar b. Azariah in the Academy /at Yavneh/, /it was decided/ that Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes make the hands impure. R. Akiba said: Heaven forbid that anyone in Israel should dispute that the Song of Songs makes the hands impure! For the whole world is not worth as much as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. All of the sacred writings /כתובים/ are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies. If there is a disagreement, it could only be about Ecclesiastes. R. Yohanan b. Yeshua, the son-in-law of R. Akiba, said: It is according to the words of Ben Azzai. Thus they disagreed, but in the end they decided to admit both books.¹

Apparently, R. Eleazar b. Azariah swayed the Academy with his argument, which was probably based on an allegorical reading of the book as a dialogue between God and Israel. Viewing the book in that light, R. Eleazar could assert that it was in fact Solomon's masterpiece:

R. Eleazar b. Azariah made a parable about /Song of Songs/: It is as a person who takes

1. Yadayim 3:5; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:11.

a se'ah of wheat to the baker and tells him, "Make me flour from this, and then from that make me fine flour, and then make me a delicate white bread." Similarly, of all of Solomon's wisdom, the only "fine flour" was the Song of Songs of Israel. The Song of Songs is the most praised of all songs, the most exalted of all songs, the most extolled of all songs.²

Another midrash makes the point more succinctly:

It is said of Solomon, AND HE SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS; AND HIS SONGS WERE A THOUSAND AND FIVE (I Kings 5:12). And the Song of Songs is the most highly praised of them all.³

Rabbi Akiba, of course, was especially fond of the Song of Songs:

R. Akiba said: If the Song of Songs had not been placed in the Torah, it still would have been worthy to guide the world.⁴

In the Zohar, Song of Songs is especially esteemed, because the allegory of love between God and Israel is at the heart of its mystical understanding. Solomon is thus praised as the greatest of poets for producing this book:

R. Jose thereupon began to speak on the words: THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS SOLOMON'S (Song 1:1). Said he: This song King Solomon poured forth when the Temple was erected and all the worlds, above and below, had reached their perfect consummation. And although concerning the exact time of its singing there is some difference of opinion among the members of the Fellowship, we may be certain that it was not sung until that time of absolute completion, when the Moon -- the Shekinah -- came to her fullness and was revealed in the full perfection of her radiance, and when the Temple

2. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:11.

3. Midrash Zuta, Shir Ha-shirim, p. 4 (bottom); Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 6.

4. Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 5; Midrash Zuta, Shir Ha-shirim, p. 4.

had been erected in the likeness of the Temple that is above. The Holy One, blessed be He, then experienced such joy as He had not known since the creation of the world. When Moses set up the Tabernacle in the wilderness, another such was raised in the heavenly spheres....But when the first Temple was completed another Temple was erected at the same time, which was a centre for all the worlds, shedding radiance upon all things and giving light to all the spheres. Then the world was firmly established, and all the supernal elements were opened to pour forth light, and all the worlds experienced such joy as had never been known to them before, and celestial and terrestrial beings alike broke forth in song. And the song which they sang is the "Song of Songs", or, as we might render, "Song of the Singers", of those musicians who chant to the Holy One, blessed be He. King David sang "A song of degrees" /Ps. 120:1/; King Solomon sang "the Song of Songs". Now what is the difference between the two? Do we not interpret both titles to signify one and the same thing? Verily, this is so, for both things are certainly one, but in the days of David all the singers of the spheres were not yet set in their rightful places to chant the praises of their King, because the Temple was not as yet in existence. For, as on earth, the Levitic singers are divided into groups, so is it likewise above, and the upper correspond to the lower. But not before the Temple was erected did they assume these their due places, and the lamp which before gave no light began to shed radiance abroad, and then this song was sung to the glory of the Supernal King, the "King to whom peace belongs".⁵ This song is superior to all the hymns of praise which had ever been sung before. The day on which this hymn was revealed on earth was perfect in all things, and therefore the song is holy of holies. It is written in the Book of Adam that on the day when the Temple would be erected the Patriarchs would awaken song both above and below. Not that they would sing them-

5. See below, p. 202 , for the explication of this pun on שלמה .

selves, but they would rouse to song those mighty singers who preside over all worlds. On that day, it is said, Jacob the "perfect" one arose and entered the Garden of Eden and caused it also to sing, and all the spices of the Garden likewise. He, therefore, it is who gave utterance to the song, since but for him the Garden would not have sung. This song comprises the whole Torah: it is a song in which those that are above and those that are below participate; a song formed in the likeness of the world above, which is the supernal Sabbath, a song through which the supernal Holy name is crowned. Therefore it is holy of holies. Why so? Because all its words are instinct with love and joy. This is because the "cup of blessing" was then given with the Right Hand; and when this is so all is joy and love; therefore all the words of the Song of Songs are perfected with love and with joy..../The Song of Songs represents the "Cup of Blessing" when tendered by the Right Hand, and therefore all love and joy is found therein, as in no other song in the world. Therefore was this song aroused from the side of the Patriarchs.

On the day when this song was revealed the Shekinah descended to earth, as it is written, AND THE PRIESTS COULD NOT STAND TO MINISTER BECAUSE OF THE CLOUD. Why? Because THE GLORY OF THE LORD HAD FILLED THE HOUSE OF THE LORD (I Kings 8:11). On that day this hymn was revealed, and Solomon sang in the power of the Holy Spirit this song wherein is to be found the summary of the whole Torah, of the whole work of Creation, of the mystery of the Patriarchs, of the story of the Egyptian exile, and the exodus therefrom, and of the Song of the Sea. It is the quintessence of the Decalogue, of the Sinaitic covenant, of the significance of Israel's wanderings through the desert, until their arrival in the Promised Land and the building of the Temple. It contains the crowning of the Holy Name with love and joy, the prophecy of Israel's exile among the nations, of their redemption, of the resurrection of the dead, and of all else until that Day which is "Sabbath to the Lord". All that was, is, and shall be, is contained in it; and indeed, even that which will take place on the "Seventh Day", which will be the

the "Lord's Sabbath", is indicated in this song. Therefore we are taught that he who recites a verse from the Song of Songs as a mere drinking song causes the Torah to dress in sackcloth and to complain before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Thy children have turned me into an amusement for a drinking bout." Yea, assuredly the Torah says this. Therefore it behooves the faithful to be wary, and to guard every word of the Song of Songs like a crown upon their heads. It may be asked, why, then, is the Song of Songs placed among the Haglographa (which are not so sacred as the other two parts of Scripture)? The answer is, because it is the Hymn of Praise sung by the Community of Israel at the time when she is crowned above. Therefore no other hymn is so pleasing to the Holy One as this....

This canticle is superior to all that preceded it; for those which were sung by Solomon's predecessors ascended only to join with the company of the songs chanted by the angels, as, for instance, the "Song of degrees to David" /Ps. 122:1/, which means, "the song which the celestial grades sing to David", to solicit nourishment from him....But when Solomon came, he sang a song which is high above even that of David, a song which is the very same as that sung by the great ones of the realms above, the pillars of the universe, in honour of the Supernal King who is the lord of all peace and harmony. Other men send up praises by means of lower Chariots, but King Solomon by means of higher Chariots. It may be asked, What of Moses, who ascended further than all other men in the grade of prophecy and love of the Holy One, blessed be He? Did his song also reach no further than the lower Chariots? The song which Moses uttered did indeed ascend on high, but the truth is, that although it was not on a level with the Canticle of King Solomon, whom no man equalled in poetry, Moses' song was praise and thanksgiving to the Supernal King who redeemed Israel and wrought many signs and wonders for them, both in Egypt and at the Red Sea; but King David and Solomon his son sang with quite different purposes. David endeavoured to prepare the virgins (the celestial grades) and to adorn them for the Matrona's presence so that She

and her maidens might be manifested in beauty and grace. When Solomon came he found the Matrona and the virgins thus adorned, so he in his turn aspired to lead the Bride to the Bridegroom. He brought the Bridegroom to the place where beneath the marriage canopy the Bride awaited Him, and drew them together with words of love, that they might be united as One, in one perfection, in perfect love. Therefore Solomon produced a more sublime song than all other men...AND HIS SONG WAS A THOUSAND AND FIVE (I Kings 5:12)...The "song" refers to the "Song of Songs". But does this song actually consist of a thousand and five? Assuredly! The "five" refers to the five gates and doors which open toward the "King whose is the peace". They are the five hundred years of the Tree of Life, the fifty years of the Jubilee. The "thousand" refers to the Tree of Life as such, to the Bridegroom who goes out from its side and takes possession of the five gates, in order to draw nigh unto the Bride and claim Her. The Day of the Holy One, blessed be He, is a thousand years, and this number symbolizes also the River which goes out of Eden.... Therefore, the Song of Songs is holy of holies, and there is no verse in this Canticle which does not contain the mystery of the "thousand and five". There are five grades contained in the title⁶....But why is the "thousand" not indicated? The truth is that this is hidden and will remain hidden until the Wife (the Shekinah) unites Herself with her Husband. Therefore Solomon endeavoured to bring that "Thousand" to the Bride in secret.... All our prayers and intercessions have this purpose, namely, that the region from whence light issues may be invigorated; for then from its reflection all below is supplied. This is the whole significance of Solomon's Canticle, that "the King to whom peace belongs" may be invigorated, for when that is so, all is invigorated from His reflected glory....⁷

Another Zohar passage seconds the idea that Song of Songs contains

6. See below, p. 201.

7. Zohar, Shemot 143a-145b (Soncino IV, pp. 3-13).

the essence of all wisdom:

Said R. Nehemiah: Blessed is he who is worthy to perceive such singing /of the angels/, for, as we know and have been taught, he who is deemed worthy to comprehend this song becomes adept in doctrine and obtains wit to discern what has been and what will be. Solomon was found worthy of such knowledge, for thus taught R. Simeon: David, peace be on him, was cognizant of it, and so could compose hymns and songs, many in number, in which he hinted concerning future events. He also became richly endowed with power in the Holy Spirit, understood matters appertaining to the Torah and to Divine wisdom, and obtained a mastery of the holy tongue. Solomon, however, was gifted with a still greater knowledge of that song; he penetrated into the essence of wisdom, and so he wrote many proverbs and made a book of the song itself. This is the meaning of his words, I GOT ME MEN SINGERS /שָׁרִים/ AND WOMEN SINGERS (Eccl. 2:8); that is to say, he acquired the knowledge of the hymn sung by heavenly and terrestrial beings. And on account of this he called his book "The Song of Songs": the song of the supernal songs, the song containing all mysteries of the Torah and of Divine wisdom; the song wherein is power to penetrate into things that were and things that will be; the song sung by the supernal princes /שָׁרִים/....When the singers here below issued from the tribe of Levi and all of them were sanctified and entered into their service, and the two choirs, the heavenly and the earthly, were both hallowed, and sang in harmony so that the worlds were in unison and one King dwelt above them, then came Solomon and made a book of the hymning of the singers, wherein is enclosed heavenly wisdom.⁸

We turn now to midrashim on the verses themselves. The Zohar derived mystical implications from the very first verse:

We have been taught that the three words,
שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֶשֶׁר (Song of Songs which)

8. Zohar, Shemot 18b-19a (Soncino III, pp. 59-60).

connote the placing of the "cup of blessing" between the Right Hand and the Left, and its raising towards "the King to whom peace belongs", grace being thus carried higher and higher to the mystery of the **אין סוף** (Infinite). Again, the four words of the title correspond to the mystery of the perfect Holy Chariot (formed by the three patriarchs and David). Again, "song" stands for King David, the mover of song; "songs" for the Fathers, the high chiefs; "Solomon" for Him Who rides in this perfect Chariot. This verse thus contains the inner meaning of the phrase, "from eternity to eternity", the mystery of the whole Faith. The whole is a perfect Chariot for that which is cognizable and that which is unknowable and which no one can apprehend. Therefore, this verse was given in four words, containing the mystery of the complete Chariot as from four sides....

שיר השירים אשר בן עקמה. Here are five grades which shall unite in the world to come: **שיר** (song) is one; **השירים** (songs) are two, which together make three; **אשר** (which) is four; **בן עקמה** (Solomon's) is five..../I/t says: SONG OF SONGS: "Song" corresponding to the "Holy" and "Songs" to the "Holies", in order that both these aspects may be fused into one whole in manner due. "Which is Solomon's":...this refers to the King "whose is the peace".⁹

The play on **שיר השירים** is further developed in other sources:

R. Nehemiah said: There was nothing about which Solomon didn't compose a song, as it is said, THE SONG OF SONGS. That makes three songs.¹⁰ Why were there three songs? The three correspond to three things in the Torah which have seventy names -- Israel, Jerusalem and the Holy One, blessed be He. /Alternately,/ he uttered three songs corresponding to the three days during which the world was served by the original good light before the sun was created, and corresponding to the three things that

9. Zohar, Shemot 144a, 145a, 145b (Soncino IV, pp. 6-7, 10, 13).

10. As R. Aibu explained, SONG makes one, SONGS makes two more, for a total of three. (Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10)

existed prior to Creation, the water, the wind and the darkness....He uttered three songs corresponding to the three ascents he enjoyed in his life¹¹....Another interpretation is that he uttered three songs corresponding to the three worlds. The first song is the song of this world, which is of seven kinds, as it is said, SEVEN TIMES A DAY DO I PRAISE THEE (Ps. 119:164). The second is the song of the /world of the/ Messiah, which is of eight /שבעה עשר/ kinds, as it is said, FOR THE LEADER; ON THE SHEMINITH /שמינית/ (Ps. 12:1). The third is the song of the world to come, which is of ten kinds, as it is said, SING PRAISES UNTO HIM WITH THE PSALTERY OF TEN STRINGS (Ps. 33:2).¹²

The last word of the first verse attributes the Song of Songs to Solomon. But allegorical interpretations of the book as a dialogue between God and Israel read the word as a reference to God, with the result that Solomon all but disappears from the book:

Every Solomon /שולמון/ mentioned in the Song of Songs is sacred: the Song to Him to whom peace belongs /reading ~~שולמון~~ of Song 1:1 as ~~שולמון~~ /, except this: MY VINEYARD, WHICH IS MINE, IS BEFORE ME; THOU, O SOLOMON, SHALT HAVE THE THOUSAND (Song 8:12) -- Solomon for himself /shall have a thousand for his army/; and TWO HUNDRED FOR THOSE THAT KEEP THE FRUIT THEREOF (ibid.) -- /viz./ the Sages /who "keep the fruit," i.e., study the Torah/. And there are some who say this also is secular: BEHOLD, IT IS THE LITTER OF SOLOMON (Song 3:7) -- "This also" /implies/ that the other verse is undoubtedly /secular/. But then what of Samuel who said: A Government which kills only one out of six /by going to war/ is not punished; for it is said: MY VINEYARD, WHICH IS MINE, IS BEFORE ME; THOU, O SOLOMON, SHALT HAVE THE THOUSAND -- for the Kingdom of Heaven /taking Solomon as referring to

11. For a discussion of the three ascents and descents, see Chapter 3, pp. 79f.
12. Midrash Zuta, Shir Ha-shirim, pp. 4 (bottom) - 5; Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 1, p. 6. According to Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10, the three songs symbolized the tri-partite character of all of Solomon's life. See especially Chapter 3, pp. 79f.

God/; AND TWO HUNDRED FOR THOSE THAT KEEP THE FRUIT THEREOF -- for the kingdom on earth. Now Samuel is not in agreement with the first Tanna nor with the "some who say"!--But this is what it means: And some there are who say this /MY VINEYARD, etc./ is sacred, and this is secular -- /the verse/ about his bed; and Samuel agrees with them. ¹³

Nor are these the only opinions on the matter:

R. Yudan and R. Levi said in the name of R. Yohanan: Wherever in this book /Song of Songs/ it speaks of "King Solomon", the text refers to King Solomon himself. Wherever it speaks of the king, simply, the text refers to the Holy One, blessed be He. But our masters said: Wherever it speaks of "King Solomon", the text refers to the King to whom peace belongs. Wherever it speaks of the king, simply, the text refers to the congregation of Israel.¹⁴

Other verses from the book are used in more familiar ways, to make a specific point. Here Song 1:17 confirms a legend about the doors of the Second Temple:

Miracles were wrought for Nicanor's doors. Our masters taught: What miracles were wrought for Nicanor's doors? When he set out to bring the doors from Alexandria in Egypt, a storm at sea threatened to drown /his ship/. They took one of the doors and threw it into the sea, but still the sea was not quieted from its raging. They then sought to throw the other one overboard, but Nicanor clung to it and said to them, "Throw me over with it." Immediately the sea rested from its raging. Then he grieved over the lost door. When he arrived at the port of Acco, the lost door burst forth from under the walls of the boat. Some say a sea creature swallowed it and vomited it up on dry land. And about it Solomon said, THE BEAMS OF OUR HOUSES ARE CEDARS, AND OUR PANELS ARE CYPRESSES (Song 1:17). Read not "cypresses" /צִפְרִיִּים/, but rather "covenant of the sea" /בְּרִית יָם/. Consequently, all the gates of the Temple were made into gold ones except for the

13. Shevu'ot 35b (Soncino, pp. 206-7).

14. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:11 (end).

gates of Nicanor, because miracles were wrought for him. Some say it was because their brass was golden-hued. R. Eliezer b. Jacob said: They were made of Corinthian brass which shone like gold.¹⁵

Song 3:7 showed that Solomon followed Moses' example when building the Temple:

KING SOLOMON MADE HIMSELF A PALANQUIN OF THE WOOD OF LEBANON (Song 3:9). /This is taken to refer to Solomon's Temple./ What is written just above this verse? BEHOLD, IT IS THE LITTER OF SOLOMON; SIXTY MIGHTY MEN ARE ABOUT IT (*ibid.* 7). This refers to the Priestly Blessing, as we have said above. /In Bemidbar Rabbah 11:3, we read: SIXTY MIGHTY MEN ARE ABOUT IT -- these are the sixty letters in the Priestly Blessing./ This is to teach that Solomon had as his sole purpose to explain the Torah, and he arranged his words according to the order of the Torah. Just as before the chapter about the Tabernacle /Nu. 7/, the Priestly Blessing is written, so too with Solomon. First he made reference to the Priestly Blessing, and afterwards he spoke about the Tabernacle /or Temple/.¹⁶

Solomon also referred to the Temple in Song 3:11, according to this midrash:

The fire which descended in Solomon's time did not depart until Manasseh. Referring to that moment Solomon said, GO FORTH, O YE DAUGHTERS OF ZION, AND GAZE UPON KING SOLOMON...IN THE DAY OF HIS ESPOUSALS (Song 3:11) -- this refers to the consecration /of the Temple/; AND IN THE DAY OF THE GLADNESS OF HIS HEART (*ibid.*) -- this refers to the completion of the building of the Temple.¹⁷

Another part of this same verse puzzled the rabbis, because it referred to something unrecorded elsewhere. This gave the rabbis

15. Yoma 38a (top).

16. Bemidbar Rabbah 12:4.

17. Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, section 187, p. 376a.

another opportunity to give the book an allegorical reading:

/GO FORTH, O YE DAUGHTERS OF ZION, AND GAZE
UPON.../ THE CROWN WHEREWITH HIS MOTHER HATH
CROWNED HIM (Song 3:11). R. Isaac said: We
have searched the whole Bible but we haven't
found any reference to Bath-sheba's making a
crown for Solomon her son. Rather, "crown"
refers to the Tent of Meeting. Just as such
a crown would be, /the Tent of Meeting/ was
studded with jewels and gems adorned with blue
and purple and crimson fabrics and linen.¹⁸

18. Bemidbar Rabbah 12:8; Shemot Rabbah 52:5; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 3:21; Pesikta deRav Kahana 1:3.

As we read at the beginning of section III (see p. 194), the canonicity of Ecclesiastes was very much in doubt, even more than Song of Songs. No single allegorical interpretation was able to transform Ecclesiastes as a whole into an esoteric book. Many verses seemed heretical and had to be brought into line through interpretation, as we will see below. Controversy about the book is thus the rule in the Midrash. The heart of the controversy was whether Ecclesiastes was divinely inspired or not:

AND HE SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS (I Kings 5:12). R. Simeon b. Menassiah said: Ecclesiastes does not make the hands impure /i.e., is not canonical/ because it is the wisdom of Solomon /and not divinely inspired/. They replied to him: But is that all Solomon said? Isn't it already stated, AND HE SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS; AND HIS SONGS WERE A THOUSAND AND FIVE? And didn't he say, ADD THOU NOT UNTO /God's/ WORDS, LEST HE REPROVE THEE, AND THOU BE FOUND A LIAR (Prov. 30:6)? What is the significance of the phrase /just above/ beginning, "And didn't he say..."? And if you say that it comes to teach that he said much, entrusting to writing what he wished, not entrusting to writing what he did not wish, then listen to the verse, ADD THOU NOT UNTO /God's/ WORDS, etc.¹

But another midrash unequivocally asserted the worthiness of Ecclesiastes:

AND BESIDES /וְיִתְּנָה/ THAT KOHELET WAS WISE (Eccl. 12:9) -- if anyone else had said these things, you would have felt a need to pay attention and listen to these words, but even more so /וְיִתְּנָה/ because Solomon said them. And if he had said them based on his his own understanding, you would have felt compelled to pay attention and listen to them, but even more so because he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to say them.²

And the following passage from the Zohar expresses clearly the

-
1. Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 5, section 179, pp. 374a-b.
 2. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:8.

attitude that the rabbis brought to the difficult parts of

Ecclesiastes:

It is written concerning Solomon, that he SPOKE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS AND HIS SONG WAS A THOUSAND AND FIVE (I Kings 5:12). This has been interpreted by the Companions to mean that every word that he uttered has three thousand allegorical meanings, as, for instance, his book Ecclesiastes..., which has a profound esoteric meaning and is written in the fashion of an allegory. Verily, there is no word in this book which does not contain profound wisdom and allegorical significance, even unto the very least and smallest verse. R. Hamnuna the Ancient, for instance, when he came to the verse, REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH, AND LET THY HEART CHEER THEE IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH, AND WALK IN THE WAYS OF THINE HEART...BUT KNOW THOU THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT (Eccl. 11:9), used to weep, saying, "Verily, this verse is fittingly taken as an allegory, and who can enlarge on it? If it is to be taken literally, it expresses no more than a fact which we see with our eyes; but if, on the other hand, the passage contains esoteric wisdom, who can apprehend it?" Then he corrected himself and said: It is written, THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF JACOB: JOSEPH BEING SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD, WAS FEEDING THE FLOCK WITH HIS BRETHREN; AND THE YOUNG MAN WAS WITH THE SONS OF BILHAH, AND WITH THE SONS OF ZILPAH, HIS FATHER'S WIVES; AND JOSEPH BROUGHT UNTO HIS FATHER THEIR EVIL REPORT (Gen. 37:2). The verse which we have just quoted from Ecclesiastes is an allegory on the esoteric meaning of this verse from the Pentateuch. REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, corresponds to AND THE YOUNG MAN; AND LET THY HEART CHEER THEE to WAS FEEDING THE FLOCK; IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH to WITH THE SONS OF BILHAH, etc; BUT KNOW THOU THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS to AND JOSEPH BROUGHT UNTO HIS FATHER THEIR EVIL REPORT; GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT corresponds to THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF JACOB: JOSEPH....Joseph was here included in Jacob. Who can fully grasp the secrets of the Torah? This allegory branches off into three thousand other allegories which are yet all comprised in this one, in which, as we see, Joseph was

included in Jacob. The three thousand other veiled implications concern Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are, however, all indicated in this allegory of the mystery of wisdom which is revealed only to the faithful....So...there is no end to the hidden meanings of wisdom. Hence it says: AND HIS SONG WAS A THOUSAND AND FIVE: that is, as we have interpreted, "the song of every proverb". However, whether the "his" refers to Solomon or to the proverb, it is all the same, since the one was the author of the other.³

But the abrasive, unsettling message of Ecclesiastes was inescapable:

THE WORDS OF KOHELET, THE SON OF DAVID (Eccl. 1:1) -- because in three cases their prophecies were words of rebuke, they were attributed to their respective prophets by name. These are they: THE WORDS OF KOHELET, THE WORDS OF AMOS (Amos 1:1), and THE WORDS OF JEREMIAH (Jer. 1:1)⁴.

A few verses of Ecclesiastes received non-controversial treatment.

The following midrash is an example:

VANITY OF VANITIES, SAITH KOHELET; VANITY OF VANITIES, ALL IS VANITY (Eccl. 1:2). R. Judah in the name of R. Simon began his discourse on VANITY OF VANITIES: Kohelet said seven "vanities" -- VANITY is one; OF VANITIES is two, making three; VANITY is one; OF VANITIES is two, making six; ALL IS VANITY makes seven. Why? To correspond to the seven days of Creation. Solomon said, "What was created on the first day? The heavens and the earth. And what is their end? THE HEAVENS SHALL VANISH AWAY LIKE SMOKE, AND THE EARTH SHALL WAX OLD LIKE A GARMENT (Is. 51:6). Vanity," he said. "What was created on the second day? The firmament /of heavens/. And what is its end? AND THE HEAVENS SHALL BE ROLLED TOGETHER AS A SCROLL (Is. 34:4). Vanity," he said. "And what was created on the third day? LET THE WATERS...BE GATHERED TOGETHER (Gen. 1:9). And what is their end? AND THE LORD WILL UTTERLY DESTROY THE TONGUE OF THE EGYPTIAN SEA (Is. 11:15). Vanity," he said. "And what was created

3. Zohar, Shemot 145a-b (Soncino IV, pp. 10-12).

4. Kohelet Rabbah 1:2.

on the fourth day? The lights /in the firmament/, as it is said, AND GOD SET THEM IN THE FIRMAMENT OF THE HEAVEN (Gen. 1:17). And what is their end? THEN THE MOON SHALL BE CONFOUNDED, AND THE SUN ASHAMED (Is. 24:23). Vanity," he said. "And what was created on the fifth day? LET THE WATERS SWARM WITH SWARMS OF LIVING CREATURES (Gen. 1:20). And what is their end? I WILL UTTERLY CONSUME ALL THINGS FROM OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH (Zeph.1:2). Vanity," he said. "And what was created on the sixth day? Man, as it is said, THE THE LORD GOD FORMED MAN (Gen. 2:7). And what is the end? FOR DUST THOU ART, AND UNTO DUST SHALT THOU RETURN (Gen. 3:19). Vanity," he said. "And what was created on the seventh day? Shabbat." He went back and looked here and there to give some flaw, but none could be found. Rather, it is all holiness and light and rest. R. Isaac said: Nevertheless, he returned and saw that man sins on Shabbat and makes himself liable for the death penalty. So he said, "This too is vanity." For that reason he said, VANITY OF VANITIES, ALL IS VANITY. And that makes seven.⁵

But the controversial verses abounded, as in the following example:

WHAT PROFIT HATH MAN OF ALL HIS LABOR WHEREIN HE LABORETH UNDER THE SUN? (Eccl. 1:3). R. Benjamin b. Levi said: The Sages sought to suppress the Book of Ecclesiastes because they found in it things which tend toward heresy. They said, "What happened to all of Solomon's wisdom that he should come and say, WHAT PROFIT HATH MAN OF ALL HIS LABOR WHEREIN HE LABORETH UNDER THE SUN? Can he mean even one's labor in Torah?" They corrected themselves and said, "He didn't say 'of all labor,' but rather, OF ALL HIS LABOR. His own labor is futile, but the labor of Torah is beneficial." R. Samuel b. R. Isaac said: The Sages sought to suppress the Book of Ecclesiastes because they found in it things which tend toward heresy. They said, "What happened to all of Solomon's wisdom that he should come and say, REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH; AND LET THY HEART CHEER THEE IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH, AND WALK IN THE WAYS OF THY HEART, AND IN THE SIGHT OF THINE EYES (Eccl. 11:9). Moses said, THAT YE GO NOT

5. Midrash Tehillim 92:2.

ABOUT AFTER YOUR OWN HEART AND YOUR OWN EYES (Nu. 15:39). And Solomon says, AND WALK IN THE WAYS OF THY HEART, AND IN THE SIGHT OF THINE EYES! There is no law and no judge! All restriction is removed!" But when he said, BUT KNOW THOU, THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT (Eccl. 11:9), they said, "Solomon has spoken well."⁶

Similarly, Eccl. 3:19 required midrashic interpretation to mute its heretical overtones:

As R. Hizkiah and R. Jesse were once walking together, the latter said: "I see from your looks that some thought is troubling you." He replied: "I am pondering on the verse: FOR THAT WHICH BEFALLETH THE SONS OF MAN BEFALLETH BEASTS, EVEN ONE THING BEFALLETH THEM (Eccl. 3:19). This saying of the wise Solomon troubles me, because it seems to give an opening to the unbelievers." "That is assuredly so," he replied. /They meet a man who offers the following explanation:/ "This is the way in which Solomon meant the verse. He was not saying it in his own name like the rest of the book, but was repeating what is said by worldly fools, that 'the hap of man and the hap of the beast /is the same/, ' etc; that is to say, that this world is the sport of chance, and there is no Providence, but 'the hap of man and the hap of beast is the same'. When Solomon observed this, he called those fools themselves 'cattle', as it says in the /preceding/ verse, 'I said in my heart concerning this saying of the sons of men that God should put them on one side and that (the faithful) should see that they are cattle for themselves' /a loose paraphrase of Eccl. 3:17-18/. A curse on those cattle, on those fools, on those faithless unbelievers! Better they had never come into the world! What did Solomon answer them? WHO KNOWETH THE SPIRIT OF MAN /which/ GOETH UPWARD, AND THE SPIRIT OF THE BEAST /which/ GOETH DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH? (*ibid.* 21) Who of those fools that /know/ not of the honour of the supreme King knows that the spirit of the sons

6. Vayikra Rabba 28:1; Pesikta deRav Kahana 8:1; Kohelet Rabbah 1:4; 11:13; Midrash Mishle 25, p. 49a; Pesikta Rabbati 18, beginning.

of man goes upwards to a supernal, precious and holy place to be nourished by the supernal brightness of the Holy King and to be included in the 'bundle of the living', while the spirit of the beast goes downwards to the earth, and not to that place where is every man of those of whom it is written, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD CREATED HE HIM (Gen. 1:27)? How can those foolish unbelievers say that there is one spirit to all? They shall be like chaff before the wind, and will be left in Gehinnom and not ascend for all generations."

R. Hizkiah and R. Jesse thereupon came and kissed him on his head, saying: "All this you knew and we were not aware! Blessed the hour in which we met thee!" He then proceeded: "This is not the only instance of such a usage. There is, for instance, the verse: THIS IS AN EVIL IN ALL THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN, THAT THERE IS ONE EVENT UNTO ALL (Eccl. 9:3): as much as to say; 'What the evil man says is, There is one hap to all'. And he goes on: 'For he who chooses (the future world) does naught, for we are well assured that for all the living there is trust' /a loose paraphrase of Eccl. 9:4/, and also that a live dog is better than a dead lion /ibid./."

This is a radical midrashic solution to the problem, namely, to deny that Solomon said the disputed verses. It indicates the lengths to which the rabbis were driven in defense of Ecclesiastes, and of Solomon's reputation for wisdom as well.

Oddly enough, a very similar verse later in Ecclesiastes raises no controversy in another midrash:

ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL; THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND TO THE WICKED (Eccl. 9:2). Solomon looked at all of history and saw that things which happen to the wicked happen also to the righteous. So he said, ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL; THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS. This refers to Abraham, as it is said, FOR I HAVE KNOWN HIM, TO THE END THAT HE MAY COMMAND HIS CHILDREN, etc. (Gen. 18:19). AND TO THE WICKED refers to Nimrod, who caused the whole world to rebel against the Holy One,

blessed be He. They both died -- THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND TO THE WICKED. /The midrash goes on in the same way to give examples for the whole verse./ The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Why did You sentence Adam to death?" He replied, "I gave him one simple commandment and he transgressed My command." They said to Him, "Lord of the universe, but what about Moses and Aaron, who observed the whole Torah from A to Z -- why did You sentence them to death?" He replied, THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND TO THE WICKED.⁸

Here God endorses an idea which the previous midrash found heretical.

In Eccl. 3:7, Solomon even expressed an orthodox view:

When Aaron's sons /Nadab and Abihu, Lev. 10:1-7/ died, Moses said to him, "Aaron my brother, your sons died to sanctify the name of the Holy One, blessed be He." When Aaron understood that his sons were pious men, he held his peace /rather than complaining against God's killing them/ and was rewarded for it, as it is said, AND AARON HELD HIS PEACE / וַיִּחַלֶּם / (Lev. 10:3). Likewise David said, RESIGN THYSELF / וַיִּחַל, also "be silent"/ TO THE LORD, AND WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM (Ps. 37:7); even though you lose many casualties, remain silent. And so too Solomon said, A TIME TO KEEP SILENCE, AND A TIME TO SPEAK (Eccl. 3:7); sometimes one remains silent and is rewarded for silence, and sometimes one speaks up and is rewarded for speaking up.⁹

In a midrash on Eccl. 4:1, the Zohar tackles the problem of theodicy:

Solomon said: SO I RETURNED AND CONSIDERED ALL THE OPPRESSIONS ("oppressed") THAT ARE DONE UNDER THE SUN, AND BEHOLD THE TEARS OF SUCH THAT WERE OPPRESSED AND THEY HAD NO COMFORTER (Eccl. 4:1)...From whence did he re-

8. Yalkut Shim'oni, Eccl. 9, section 989, p. 546a; Pesikta deRav Kahana 26:1; Tanhuma Buber, Va'ethanan 1.

9. Zevahim 115b.

turn? /The midrash explains that he returned from flying all over the earth. See Chapter 3, pp. 94ff./

Could he then have viewed upon his journey all such as were oppressed? Hardly so; but he was referring to the little ones, to the sucklings snatched away from their mothers' breasts. Such as these are indeed "oppressed" from all sides; oppressed above in the celestial regions, and oppressed on earth below. There is none oppressed like those whose oppression is transmitted by heredity, concerning whom it is written: HE VISITS THE SINS OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATIONS (Ex. 20:5). How is this? King Solomon loudly gives the answer when he says, A MAN THAT IS OPPRESSED THROUGH THE BLOOD OF HIS SOUL SHALL FLEE TO THE PIT; NO ONE WILL STAY HIM (Prov. 28:17). Since he is "oppressed with the blood of a soul" (i.e. has committed some grievous sin), either he or his son or his son's son will be "oppressed" (i.e. wronged) in the "balance"; he shall flee to the pit away from the place of righteousness and none shall stay him; because he has oppressed the blood of the soul he shall himself be oppressed by the other side, or his seed shall bear this oppression of retribution for him and on his account. Hence it says, "all the oppressed", as much as to say, "I have considered all those that are oppressed and all the manners of their oppression, and the reason of their being oppressed." Now, this class of oppressed ones are said to be "made /done/ under the sun", because their bodies were actually made before they were violently carried away, there being others who are never so much as fashioned on this earth, though spirits are waiting for them. Others, again, are "made", as it were, in defiance of the Almighty. Thus, when a man steals his neighbor's wife, either openly or secretly, and a child is born of such adulterous union, and the Holy One has perforce to fashion its body and give it form, then that child is indeed "an oppressed one who is made such", literally, in despite of the Almighty. Solomon reflected on this and said: "I consider the sad fate of these hapless oppressed ones who have been 'made', how they shed tears before the Holy One. They complain before Him and make moan, saying, When a person commits he must assuredly die. But, sovereign of the Universe, when a child is but one day old, shall he be judged? These are THE TEARS OF SUCH THAT WERE OPPRESSED AND THEY HAD NO COMFORTER." There are many different

kinds among them, but they all shed tears. Here is, for instance, a child born in incest. As soon as he emerges into the world he is separated from the community of the holy people, and the unfortunate bastard laments and sheds tears before the Holy One, and complains: "Lord of the world! If my parents have sinned, wherein is my guilt? I have ever striven to do only good works before Thee." But the greatest grief of all emanates from those "oppressed ones" that are but little sucklings which have been removed from their mothers' breasts. These can indeed cause the whole world to weep, and there are no tears like unto theirs, for these are tears which spring from the inmost and deepest recesses of the heart, causing the whole world to wonder and say: "The Holy One's judgments are forever righteous and all His paths are ways of truth. But why is it necessary that these poor little ones, who are blameless and without sin, should die? Where is now the true and righteous judgment of the Lord of the world? If they must die because of their parents' sins", then they certainly 'have no comforter'." However, the actual fact is that the tears of these "oppressed ones" intercede for and protect the living, and because of their innocence and the power of their intercession a place is eventually prepared for them such as even the perfectly righteous cannot attain to or occupy; for the Holy One does in truth love them with a special and particular love. He unites Himself with them and prepares for them a supernal place, very near to Himself.¹⁰

The ultimate answer, then, is that all apparent injustice in this life will be corrected in the next life.

Eccl. 4:2 is a provocative verse, and it provoked a lengthy response:

/R. Tanhum/ said: Solomon, where is your wisdom, where is your intelligence? It's not enough that your words contradict those of David your father, but they also contradict each other. David your father said, THE DEAD PRAISE NOT THE LORD (Ps. 115:17), but you said, WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD THAT ARE ALREADY DEAD (Eccl. 4:2); and then you turned

10. Zohar, Shemot 112b-113b (Soncino III, pp. 334-7).

right around and said, FOR A LIVING DOG IS BETTER THAN A DEAD LION (Eccl. 9:4). But there really is no contradiction. David said, THE DEAD PRAISE NOT THE LORD, meaning that a person should always occupy himself with Torah and mitzvot before he dies, because once he is dead, he can no longer occupy himself with Torah and mitzvot, so the Holy One, blessed be He, is no longer praised by him. And this is what R. Yohanan said: What is the meaning of the phrase, SET APART / פָּקַדְתָּ, here read as "free"/ AMONG THE DEAD (Ps. 88:6)? When a person dies, he becomes free from the /duties of the/ Torah and the mitzvot. And Solomon said, WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD THAT ARE ALREADY DEAD, because when Israel sinned in the desert, Moses stood before the Holy One, blessed be He, and uttered many prayers and supplications before Him and was not answered. But when he said, REMEMBER ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND ISRAEL, THY SERVANTS (Ex. 32:13), he was answered immediately. So did not Solomon wisely say, WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD THAT ARE ALREADY DEAD. Another interpretation: According to the way of the world, a human prince issues a decree and is in doubt whether it will be carried out or not. Or, if you wish, he is in doubt whether it will be obeyed after he is dead, even if it is obeyed while he's alive. But if Moses our teacher issued so many decrees and instituted so many regulations, and they will survive forever, didn't Solomon say well, WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD, etc. /The next interpretation of the verse is that in which Solomon calls upon David's merit to open the gates of the Temple in order to bring in the Ark. See Chapter 1 , pp. 28f. Then follows the story of David's death, which leads to an explanation of Eccl. 9:4. See Chapter 9 , pp. 253f ./¹¹

Eccl. 4:8 served to correct an oversight which Solomon committed

in Proverbs:

R. Aha said: The Holy One, blessed be He, was angry at Solomon when he said this verse /Prov. 24:21/. He said to him, A matter of sanctification you said in the /esoteric/

11. Shabbat 30a-b; Devarim Rabbah 3:15; Shemot Rabbah 44:2.

language of notarikon -- MINGLE NOT WITH
THOSE WHO ARE GIVEN TO CHANGE/ שׁוֹנֵי חֵן,
understood as שׁוֹנֵי חֵן, "two", implying
that such people assert that there is a
second deity besides God! (*ibid.*)!
Immediately Solomon went back and clarified
the matter -- THERE IS ONE THAT IS ALONE,
AND HE HATH NOT A SECOND; YEA, HE HATH
NEITHER SON NOR BROTHER (Eccl. 4:8). He
has no brother no son, but rather, HEAR,
O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS
ONE (Deut. 6:4).¹²

R. Judah ha-Nasi discovered the truth of Eccl. 5:11 through his
own experience:

SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF A LABOURING MAN
(Eccl. 5:11). Rabbi came out of the bath,
wrapped himself in his garments and sat
down to attend to the needs of the people.
His servant mixed him a cup /of wine and
water/; but because he was busy with the
needs of the people, he had no leisure to
receive it from him, and the servant be-
came drowsy and fell asleep. Rabbi turned,
and gazing at him explained, "Rightly did
Solomon say, SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF A
LABOURING MAN, WHETHER HE EAT LITTLE OR
MUCH; BUT THE SATIETY OF THE RICH WILL
NOT SUFFER HIM TO SLEEP -- as, for ex-
ample, I who am busy attending to the
needs of the people; I am not even allowed
to sleep."¹³

An apparent inconsistency in Eccl. 6:1-2 is easily resolved in
the next midrash:

R. Abba /said/: THERE IS AN EVIL WHICH
I HAVE SEEN UNDER THE SUN, AND IT IS HEAVY
UPON MAN (Eccl. 6:1). The evil here re-
ferred to...is the evil residing in the
hardened heart that longs to obtain
dominion in affairs of this world, but is
altogether regardless of the other world.
Scripture continues: A MAN TO WHOM GOD
GIVETH RICHES, WEALTH AND HONOUR (*ibid.* 2).
There is here an apparent contradiction,

12. Devarim Rabbah 2:33.

13. Kohelet Rabbah 5:14 (Soncino, p. 151).

since it first says, SO THAT HE WANTETH NOTHING FOR HIS SOUL OF ALL THAT HE DESIRETH (*ibid.*), and then goes on, YET GOD GIVETH HIM NOT POWER TO EAT THEREOF (*ibid.*). If he is in want of nothing for himself, how can we say that God gives him not power to eat thereof? There is, however, an inner meaning here as in all the words of Solomon, and although we have to take note also of the outer garb, we must look deeper into the meaning of this verse, which is as follows. There is a man to whom the Holy One, blessed be He, gives a certain riches which he may enjoy in the next world and which may remain with him as a capital, to wit, the ever-enduring capital, which consists of the realm of the bundle of souls. It is thus incumbent on man to reserve and leave behind him that capital, which he will receive after he has left this world. This capital is indeed the Tree of Life belonging to the other world, the fruit of which alone has any place or room in this world. The good man thus enjoys its fruit in this world whilst the capital remains for him for the other world, where he obtains the superior celestial life. But if a man has sullied himself and followed his selfish desires, and "wanted nothing", that is, abstained from gratifying no desire, then that Tree remains apart and will not acknowledge him on high, for GOD GIVETH HIM NOT POWER TO EAT THEREOF and to have the reward of that riches, BUT A STRANGER EATETH IT (*ibid.*), as we read elsewhere: HE /the wicked man/ MAY PREPARE /a garment/, BUT THE JUST SHALL PUT IT ON (Job 27:17). It thus behoves man to use what the Holy One, blessed be He, has given him so as thereby to merit the next world. He will thus enjoy of it in this world and have the capital left for the next world to be bound up in the bundle of life.¹⁴

Another potentially heretical verse, challenging the justice of Providence, is defused in the following midrash:

14. Zohar, Bemidbar 155b-156a (Soncino V, pp. 218-9).

King Solomon said: ALL I HAVE SEEN IN THE DAYS OF MY VANITY (Eccl. 7:15). In the days of King Solomon the moon was full, and Solomon was the wisest of men and he saw all: he saw "All" attached to the Moon and illuminating her like the sun. Now, when the righteous are numerous in the world, this "all" does not depart from the Sun, and receives all anointing and joy from above to unite with the Moon, for whose sake it is thus enriched. But when sinners are numerous in the world, and the Moon is darkened, the RIGHTEOUS /One/ PERISHETH IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS (*ibid.*), that is, he loses all this as he cannot unite with the Moon. Then, too all the side of the left is aroused, and the prosperity of sinners is prolonged; hence it is written, AND THERE IS A WICKED MAN WHO PROLONGETH HIS LIFE IN HIS EVILDOING (*ibid.*). Also we may interpret the words, THERE IS A RIGHTEOUS MAN THAT PERISHETH IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, to mean that when sinners multiply and judgment impends, the righteous man is seized for their sins /because the righteous failed to prevent the sinners from their sinning/...¹⁵

Eccl. 7:28 presents a very pessimistic, even cynical view of human nature. But some legends confirmed this opinion. In Chapter 6 pp. 150ff, we read one such legend. There, the Sanhedrin and the people are shocked by Solomon's harsh view, but he proves himself right. Here is another legend which tends to confirm Solomon's especially dim view of women:

It happened in the days of King Solomon that a certain man went from Tiberias to Bethar to study Torah. He had a very handsome son. One young woman who saw him immediately said to her father, "I beg of you, marry me to that young man." So her father chased after him and said to the young man, "If you wish to take a wife, I will give you my daughter." He said yes. He immediately married the daughter and returned home and was happy with his wife for a year. At the end of a year, his wife said to him, "I beg of you, take me to my family, that I may see

15. Zohar, Vayikra 46a-b (Soncino V, p. 11).

them." Immediately he prepared horses and gifts and food and drink and set out with his wife to visit her family. As they were on their way, an armed bandit came upon them. When the woman looked at the bandit, desire for her entered his heart, so the woman and the bandit clasped each other. They tied up the young man with ropes and the bandit had intercourse with the woman. Afterwards the bandit /and the woman/ ate and drank together. The young man was tied to a tree and saw the whole thing. Afterwards the bandit went to sleep along with the woman, and he took the pitcher and put it under his head and slept. A snake came along and drank from the wine and spewed up its deadly poison into the wine. When the bandit awoke from his sleep, he took the pitcher and drank from it and died. When the young man saw the miracle which had occurred for him, he said to his wife, "I beg of you, free me; remove these ropes from me." She replied, "I am afraid you will kill me." He said to her, "I swear I will not kill you." So she searched around the bandit and found a dry branch and freed her husband. Then the two of them proceeded to her father's house. When the family saw her, they were overjoyed and prepared food and drink. Her husband told them, "I shall not eat nor drink until I tell you what happened to me." So he told the whole story. What did her father do? He killed his sinful daughter. Thus Solomon said in his wisdom, /One honest/ WOMAN /in a thousand/ I HAVE NOT FOUND (Eccl. 7:28).¹⁶

Two other midrashim interpreted verses from Ecclesiastes in such a way as to tone down their encouragement of physical pleasure:

R. Hiya arose one night to study the Torah, R. Jose the lesser, who was still a youth, being with him. R. Hiya began by quoting: GO THY WAY, EAT THY BREAD WITH JOY, AND DRINK THY WINE WITH A MERRY HEART; FOR GOD NOW ACCEPTETH THY WORKS (Eccl. 9:7). He said: "What made Solomon say this? Truly, all Solomon's words were uttered in wisdom, and when a man walks in the way of the Holy

One, He draws near to him and gives him peace and rest, so that he enjoys his bread and his wine, the Holy One being well pleased with him and his work." Then said the young man: "If this is all that the words mean, where is their great wisdom?" R. Hiya replied: "My son, cook thy meat well /or, "when thou comest to ripeness"/ and thou wilt understand." Said the youth: "Even without cooking I understood the meaning thereof." Said R. Hiya: "How so?" He replied: "I have once heard from my father that in this verse Solomon admonishes man to crown the Community of Israel with joy, which is the 'Right Side', represented by bread, and then with wine, which is the 'Left Side', in order that she may be firm in faith, since complete and perfect joy is in the union of 'Right' and 'Left'; and when she is between the two the world is full of blessing, bounty, righteousness, and grace. And all this is accomplished when the Holy One, blessed be He, is satisfied with the works of the children of men." R. Hiya then went up to him, kissed him, and said: "Assuredly, I had intended to say this, but purposely left it to thee; and now I perceive that the Holy One desires to crown thee with the Torah."¹⁷

As R. Eleazar was once standing before his father, R. Simeon, he quoted to him the verse: SEE LIFE WITH THE WIFE WHOM THOU LOVEST ALL THE DAYS OF THE LIFE OF THY VANITY (Eccl. 9:9). "This," he said, "is a hint to a man that he should unite life with this place, the measure of day with the measure of night. All Solomon's words," he went on, "are written in wisdom, yet it would seem here that he is giving the rein to worldliness, and equally in the words that follow: WHATSOEVER THY HAND FINDETH TO DO, DO WITH THY MIGHT, FOR THERE IS NO WORK, NOR DEVICE, NOR KNOWLEDGE, NOR WISDOM, IN THE GRAVE, WHITHER THOU GOEST (*ibid.* 10). How could the wise Solomon speak thus? But, indeed, all the words of Solomon have a deep inner significance. What is indicated here is that man should always merge the left in the right, and all his actions should be controlled by the right."¹⁸

By far the most controversial of Solomon's books, Ecclesiastes

17. Zohar, Shemot 29a (Soncino III, pp. 95-96).

18. Zohar, Bemidbar 177b-178a (Soncino V, pp. 240-1).

called into question Solomon's wisdom. But the reputation of that wisdom encouraged the rabbis to look deeply into his words in the search for esoteric meanings which could be reconciled with orthodoxy. The interpretive skill of the rabbis thus vindicated Solomon's wisdom and the books which made it manifest.

Solomon was fabulously wealthy and extravagant, according to clear biblical statements. The rabbis found this wealth fascinating, but also dangerous, leading Solomon to excess. This chapter discusses both aspects of the midrashic reaction to Solomon's wealth.

Surveying the extent of Solomon's wealth, the rabbis found it utterly extraordinary:

I GATHERED ME ALSO SILVER AND GOLD (Eccl. 2:8). It is written, AND THE KING MADE SILVER TO BE IN JERUSALEM AS STONES (I Kings 10:27). Is it possible that silver was like stones in the streets and courtyards and yet it wasn't stolen? Rather, they were huge stones of five cubits and ten cubits. It is taught that even the weights for scales were made of gold in Solomon's days. They used golden scales capable of weighing kantarim (288 kilograms each), and each weight, large and small, was made of gold.¹

Another stunning example of Solomon's wealth was his use of it in the vessels of the Temple:

AND THE FLOWERS, AND THE LAMPS AND THE TONGS, OF GOLD, AND THAT PERFECT GOLD (II Chron. 4:21). What is "perfect /תופא/ gold"? R. Ammi said it was the result of consuming in fire all the pure gold of Solomon, as R. Judah said in the name of Rav: Solomon made ten candlesticks. For each one he brought one thousand talents of gold, and they passed it through the furnace a thousand times, until they brought it out at one talent.²

The Bible also tells us that Solomon owned thousands of horses.

The rabbis magnified the number as a way of reconciling two conflicting

1. Kohelet Rabbah 2:10.

2. Menahot 29a. For other midrashim on the Temple vessels, see Chapter 1, section IV. The continuation of this passage is quoted there on p. 25, from Bemidbar Rabbah 12:4. Masechet Kelim deals specifically with the amounts of jewels and precious metals used in the vessels, as quoted on pp. 21f.

passages:

One verse says, AND SOLOMON HAD FORTY THOUSAND STALLS OF HORSES FOR HIS CHARIOTS (I Kings 5:6). But another verse says, AND SOLOMON HAD FOUR THOUSAND STALLS FOR HORSES (II Chron. 9:25). What are we to make of this? If he had forty thousand stables, then each one held four thousand stalls of horses. And if he had four thousand stables, then each one held forty thousand stalls of horses.³

Solomon also had twelve thousand horsemen for all his horses (I Kings 5:6), but they were always idle because there were no wars during Solomon's reign.⁴

Solomon spent his wealth on other public works besides the Temple:

I MADE ME GARDENS AND PARKS (Eccl. 2:5). This is to be understood literally. AND I PLANTED TREES IN THEM OF ALL KINDS OF FRUIT (*ibid.*)--even peppers. R. Abba bar Kahana said: Solomon used the demons, sending them to India to bring him water from there to water the peppers here and so produce fruit. But R. Yannai b. R. Simeon said: If you say that, you must conclude that Solomon went to a lot of trouble. Actually, though, Solomon in his wisdom stood over the foundation of the earth and discerned which tap-root went where, and he planted each plant over the tap-root from its original country. Thus he was able to produce the fruits. I MADE ME POOLS OF WATER (*ibid.* 6).--reservoirs--TO WATER THEREFROM THE WOOD SPRINGING UP WITH TREES (*ibid.*)--this refers to the land of Israel, as it is said, AND THE KING /Solomon/ PUT THEM /his golden shields/ IN THE HOUSE OF THE FOREST OF LEBANON /i.e., his palace, representing the whole country/ (I Kings 10:17)...I GOT ME... THE DELIGHTS OF THE SONS OF MEN (Eccl. 2:8), that is, public baths and lavatories. WOMEN VERY MANY (*ibid.*), that is, numerous demonesses to heat them.⁵

-
3. Sanhedrin 21b; Sifre Nu. 42; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 5, section 177, p. 374a.
 4. Sanhedrin 13a (see Rashi).
 5. Kohelet Rabbah 2:7; Tanhuma Buber, Kedoshim 10.

Solomon's table was famous for both quantity and quality:

AND SOLOMON'S PROVISION FOR ONE DAY WAS THIRTY MEASURES OF FINE FLOUR, AND SIXTY MEASURES OF MEAL...AND FATTED FOWL (I Kings 5:2). What were the "fatted fowl" /טורטרים/ Rav said they would feed /טורטרים/ them against their will, and Samuel said they would feed them and then leave them alone. And R. Yohanan said they would bring a dove from its feeding without coercion and a chicken from its dung without coercion. R. Yohanan said that the choicest of cattle is the ox, and the choicest of birds is the chicken. Gidlon bar Aston said in the name of Rav: These /birds/ were for the starch of the chefs. R. Isaac said: They were for the spices poured in pots. R. Isaac said: Solomon had a thousand wives, and each one would prepare such a meal, thinking that Solomon might dine with her that day.⁶

The "fatted fowl" attracted comment in another such midrash as well:

AND THOSE OFFICERS PROVIDED VICTUAL FOR KING SOLOMON...THEY LET NOTHING BE LACKING (I Kings 5:7). What does it mean that "they let nothing be lacking?" R. Hama bar Hanina said: Solomon's table never was without /spinach/ even during the dry season or without cucumbers during the rainy season; they were there year round...AND SOLOMON'S PROVISION FOR ONE DAY.../included/ FATTED FOWL /טורטרים/ (I Kings 5:2). What were these "fatted fowl"? Our masters said they were from Barbaria /ברבריא/, generally a foreign country, specifically Britannia or Barbary/. R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Judah: It was a large bird, excellent and highly desirable, which would come up and rest on Solomon's table every day. Whence did it come? From Barbaria, each day.⁷

Legend embellished the image of Solomon's royal hospitality, even

6. Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 5, section 176, p. 374a.

7. Kohelet Rabbah 2:9; Devarim Rabbah 1:5; Yalkut Shim'oni, loc. cit.; Pesikta deRav Kahana 6:1; Pesikta Rabbati 16, p. 81b. In the latter three sources, it is clearer that the bird was served as food each day. On animals offering themselves as food for Solomon, see Chapter 12, p. 286.

giving it a Greco-Roman twist:

AND TWELVE OXEN (Nu. 7:3)--this refers to the twelve officers who provided for the needs of the king /Solomon/ and his household, each one for a month, as it is said, AND SOLOMON HAD TWELVE OFFICERS OVER ALL ISRAEL, WHO PROVIDED VICTUALS FOR THE KING AND HIS HOUSEHOLD: EACH MAN HAD TO MAKE PROVISION FOR A MONTH IN THE YEAR (I Kings 4:7). And each officer had eighteen thousand subordinate officers, and each of these subordinates had one thousand captains over a thousand. These captains of thousands had captains over hundreds, and the captains over hundreds had captains over fifties, and they in turn had captains over tens. They provided everything for the king and his household. They let nothing be lacking during their respective months. The food of Solomon's table for one day amounted to thirty measures of meal; ten fat, healthy oxen which had been fed dough mingled with oil and which had drunk only milk; twenty oxen fattened on grass and barley; one hundred fat sheep; one hundred deer; thirty gazelles; twenty roebucks; kids, birds, and fish; every kind of delicacy beyond number. As it is said, AND SOLOMON'S PROVISION FOR ONE DAY WAS THIRTY MEASURES OF FINE FLOUR, AND THREESCORE MEASURES OF MEAL; TEN FAT OXEN, AND TWENTY OXEN OUT OF THE PASTURES, AND A HUNDRED SHEEP, BESIDE HARTS, AND GAZELLES, AND ROEBUCKS, AND FATTED FOWL (I Kings 5:2-3). What were the "fatted fowl"? R. Eleazar said, "They even raised pheasants." R. Yohanan said they were fattened birds. A WAGON FOR EVERY TWO OF THE PRINCES (Nu. 7:3)--these wagons refer to the two princes who would bring each upholstered chariot along with two wagons for the four horses, in order to race on the king's hippodrome. AND FOR EACH ONE AN OX (*ibid.*) refers to the son of the prince who would drive the chariot. R. Yohanan asked R. Zera, "How many races did the king stage each year?" He replied, "Twelve, one for each of the twelve officers. Each would serve his month, and THEY LET NOTHING BE LACKING (I Kings 5:7)." R. Yohanan said to him, "But weren't there thirteen of them?" /See I Kings 4:7-19, where twelve officers and an officer over all the other officers is mentioned./ R. Zera replied, "One of them would not stage races with horses, but rather would have young men run the races. Those young men had perfectly-formed legs and could run faster than

any horse or other animal." From which tribe did they come? R. Jose said from Naphtali, as it is said, NAPHTALI IS A HIND LET LOOSE (Gen. 49:21). R. Yohanan said from the tribe of Gad, as it is said, AND OF THE GADITES...THEY WERE AS SWIFT AS THE ROES UPON THE MOUNTAINS (I Chron. 12:9). How many were there? Ten thousand youths. These youths would be sustained from the king's table. They would race in the month of Tevet. And of them it is written, AND IT WAS SO, THAT AS OFT AS THE KING WENT INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, THE GUARD /^{לְרַגְלָיו}, "the runners"/ BORE /the gold shields/, AND BROUGHT THEM BACK INTO THE GUARD-CHAMBER. (I Kings 14:28)....How long was the race track? Three parasangs /on one side/ and three parasangs /on the other/, and one parasang /between the two parallel sides/. In the middle two mountains had been built and landscaped, and every kind of animal and bird was placed on them. Around them the horses and the runners would race eight times a day. His students asked R. Zera, "On what day did they run the races?" R. Zera told them, "At the end of the month." R. Jose said, "At the beginning of the month." Abaye said, "On the second of the month." R. Yohanan said, "On the third of the month, since in those days, the king would give a public feast. At the end of the month he would do it for the sages and their students and the priests and the Levites. On the first of the month he would do it for all the Israelites living in Jerusalem. On the second of the month he would do it for all those coming from the cities and villages and all foreigners. So on the third of the month, would he not have the races?" His students asked him, "From what place did that feast issue?" He told them, "It is written, HE MADE BEFORE THE HOUSE TWO PILLARS OF THIRTY AND FIVE CUBITS HIGH, AND THE CAPITAL THAT WAS ON THE TOP OF EACH OF THEM WAS FIVE CUBITS (II Chron. 3:15). What was the capital? There were two gold lions on top of each pillar, and out of them flowed different fragrances, to fulfill what is said, THINE OINTMENTS HAVE A GOODLY FRAGRANCE...THEREFORE DO THE MAIDENS /^{לְעֵלְמָוֶת}/ LOVE THEE (Song 1:3). Read not ^{לְעֵלְמָוֶת}, but rather ^{לְעֵלְמָוֶת}/"worlds"/. And from where do the fragrances flow? From the Garden of Eden, to show Israel an example of the time to come, when they will see all these things with their own eyes." His students were amazed, but R. Yohanan said to them, "Why are you surprised that the humblest Israelite should be

greater than Solomon in his reign? In the days of Solomon, spiced wine flowed from two lions, and perfumes from the other two. But in the time to come, streams shall be as fruitful as a mustard-plant or as the river Euphrates, streams all of balsamum and spice and wine and milk and honey and every kind of sweet food prepared for the righteous. And lest you should think, heaven forbid, that the wicked shall see these streams, it is said, HE SHALL NOT LOOK UPON THE RIVERS, THE FLOWING STREAMS OF HONEY AND CURD (Job. 20:17)." R. Yohanan said, "There were four bleachers in the king's hippodrome. Each one held four thousand people, and in each one there were fashioned lattice-works and capitals reinforced with iron and brass and gold. On each capital were seven wooden platforms, one on top of the other, and four stone tiers, one on top of the other. On each layer were one hundred men. And in each bleacher were two doors of olive wood. Set in them was every kind of vessel of gold, with precious stones and jewels and angels and palmettes set in the gold. They cast light to a great distance from Jerusalem. In front of each bleacher were a flute and a pipe singing praise before heaven, and they played various melodies on the flute." R. Yose said, "The people were divided into four groups: the king and his servants and the scholars and their servants and the priests and the Levites wore blue; all other Israelites /from Jerusalem/ wore white; those Israelites coming from cities and villages and other places wore red; and gentiles coming from great distances to bring a gift to the king wore green." His students asked him, "What was the purpose for these four colors of clothing?" He told them, "They correspond to the seasons. From Tishrei to Tevet /autumn/, the days are as the color blue. From Tevet to Nissan, the snow falls, so they wore white. From Nissan to Tammuz, the sea is good for sailing, so they wore green. From Tammuz to Tishrei, the fruits are beautiful and red, so they wore red clothes."⁸

Of course, the huge cost of Solomon's luxuries was paid by all of

8. Beit Ha-midrash V, pp. 37-39.

Israel, and it was a ruinous burden:

"I /God/ gave you /Israel/ one king, and you weren't able to sustain him." Who was this? Solomon son of David. AND SOLOMON'S PROVISION FOR ONE DAY WAS THIRTY MEASURES OF FINE FLOUR, AND SIXTY MEASURES OF MEAL (I Kings 5:2). R. Samuel b. R. Isaac said: That was just for the confections; no one could provide enough for the meal itself.⁹

Solomon himself paid a price for all his extravagance. For violating the prohibitions against multiplying horses and wives and money (Deut. 17:16-17), he was punished with loss of his throne and his wealth, although most midrashim agree that he regained both.¹⁰

The rabbis did not wish to condemn wealth per se. They recognized its desirability:

AND WHATSOEVER MINE EYES DESIRED I KEPT NOT FROM THEM; I WITHHELD NOT MY HEART FROM ANY JOY (Eccl. 2:10). This refers to the joy of wealth.¹¹

But the rabbis did distinguish between good and bad uses of wealth:

There are some who increased wealth to their benefit and some who did so to their harm. David and Solomon increased wealth to their benefit; Korah and Haman did so to their harm.¹²

This midrash indicates that Solomon's wealth was generally regarded as a good thing. Indeed, Solomon's reign was fondly remembered as one

9. Pesikta deRav Kahana 6:1; Pesikta Rabbati 16, p. 81b; Tanhuma, Pinhas 12; Bemidbar Rabbah 21:19.

10. See Chapter 2 for a full discussion of Solomon's sins and punishment. One midrash, Yalkut Ha-makiri, Ps. 71:9, is somewhat exculpatory, at least in regard to Solomon's horses. It notes that at the beginning of his reign, Solomon not only did not multiply horses, but he had no horses at all, riding instead upon a mule.

11. Kohelet Rabbah 2:13.

12. Ibid. 1:18.

of prosperity for Israel:

AND SHE /Ruth/ SAT BESIDE THE REAPERS; AND THEY REACHED HER PARCHED CORN, AND SHE DID EAT AND WAS SATISFIED, AND LEFT THEREOF (Ruth 2:14). R. Eleazar said: SHE DID EAT refers to the days of David; AND WAS SATISFIED refers to the days of Solomon; AND LEFT THEREOF refers to the days of Hezekiah. And others say: SHE DID EAT refers to the days of David and Solomon; AND WAS SATISFIED refers to the days of Hezekiah; AND LEFT THEREOF refers to the days of Rabbi Judah the Prince.¹³

So prosperous were the reigns of David and Solomon that converts were not accepted at that time, for the Israelites suspected their motives for wanting to join the faith.¹⁴

Solomon's table became symbolic of wealth and the ultimate in hospitality:

It once happened that R. Yohanan b. Mattia said to his son, "Go hire some workers for us." He went and apportioned food for them. When he returned to his father, he said to him, "My son, even if you made for them a feast like that of Solomon in his day, you would not have fulfilled your obligation to them...."¹⁵

If Tish'ah Be'av falls on Shabbat, or if the day prior to it falls on Shabbat, one should eat and drink his fill and even beyond, even as much as a feast of Solomon in his day.¹⁶

Solomon even gave his name to a particularly fine variety of matzah.¹⁷

13. Shabbat 113b.

14. Avodah Zarah 3b; Yevamot 24b.

15. M. Baba Metsia 7:1; Baba Metsia 86b. The latter source goes on to say that Abraham's hospitality to the three angels was greater even than Solomon's.

16. Ta'anit 29b; Eruvin 40b-41a.

17. Pesahim 36a.

Solomon was the wealthiest man in Jewish history, as this midrash indicates:

When idolators eat and drink they engage in foolish talk: "Who was wiser than Balaam? Who was a greater hero than Goliath? Who was richer than Haman?" But Israel comes and replies to them, "...Was not Korah rich? Wasn't Solomon rich? As it is said, AND THE KING MADE SILVER TO BE IN JERUSALEM AS STONES (I Kings 10:27)." And everyone agrees with Israel.¹⁸

So Solomon became the symbol of, and authority on, great wealth:

If anyone else had said, VANITY OF VANITIES (Eccl. 1:2), people would have said, "This fellow who hasn't even a penny to buy food says /of wealth/, VANITY OF VANITIES!?" But it was appropriate for Solomon to say it, because of him it is written, AND THE KING MADE SILVER TO BE IN JERUSALEM AS STONES (I Kings 10:27)...If anyone else had said, /God/ HATH MADE EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME (Eccl. 3:11), people would have said, "This fellow who has never in his life eaten anything says, HE HATH MADE EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME!?" But it was appropriate for Solomon to say it, because of him it is written, AND THOSE OFFICERS PROVIDED VICTUAL FOR KING SOLOMON...THEY LET NOTHING BE LACKING (I Kings 5:7).¹⁹

18. Bemidbar Rabbah 10:3.

19. Devarim Rabbah 1:5; Kohelet Rabbah 3:13.

I

The rabbis viewed Solomon in relation to his father David sometimes in comparative terms, and sometimes in terms of equality. The midrashic treatment of David's role in the building of the Temple reflects both these views. The comparative tendency naturally appears in explanations of why Solomon built it, and not David:

One verse says, SHALT THOU BUILD ME A HOUSE FOR ME TO DWELL IN? (II Sam. 7:5). But another verse says, THOU SHALT NOT BUILD ME A HOUSE TO DWELL IN (I Chron. 17:4). How can I reconcile these two verses? /The second one/ means, "You will not build it"; /the first/ means, "Your son will build it". /God said to David,/ "You put your own honor before Mine. Only after you established yourself in the house of cedars did you turn your attention to building the Temple. But Solomon your son placed My honor before his own"; as it is said, IN THE ELEVENTH YEAR /...WAS THE (TEMPLE) FINISHED...SO WAS HE SEVEN YEARS IN BUILDING IT/ (I Kings 6:38); and afterwards, AND SOLOMON WAS BUILDING HIS OWN HOUSE THIRTEEN YEARS (ibid. 7:1).¹

In the following midrash, David's moral culpability is given as the reason for his not building the Temple:

On the day that David slew Goliath the Philistine, the women of Israel showered all their silver and gold upon him, and he set it aside for the Temple. When a three-year-long famine came, the Israelites besought him to give them /money to buy food elsewhere/, but he wasn't willing to give them a thing. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "You didn't accept the responsibility to sustain the poor with /the gold and silver for the Temple/. By your life, you shall not build it, but it shall be built by Solomon your son"; as it is written, THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO NATHAN SAYING.... /I WILL SET UP THEY SEED AFTER THEE,/ THAT SHALL PROCEED OUT OF THY BODY.... HE WILL BUILD A HOUSE FOR MY NAME (II Sam. 7:4, 12, 13).²

1. Pesikta Rabbati 2, p. 6b; 6, p. 23b; Yalkut Shim'oni, II Sam. 7, section 144, p. 367a.

2. Midrash Zuta, Ruth, p. 51.

PROCEED OUT OF THY BODY.... HE WILL BUILD A
HOUSE FOR MY NAME (II Sam. 7:4, 12, 13).²

David himself told Solomon it was on account of his having shed blood that he could not build the Temple (I Chron. 22:8). But in the Midrash the rabbis sought to exculpate David, and ultimately the comparison with Solomon was turned to David's favor:

A PSALM, A SONG AT THE DEDICATION OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID (Ps. 30:1). Come and see -- Solomon built the Temple, but it's called by David's name! Actually, David was worthy to have built it, but on account of one thing he didn't build it, even though he intended to do so. Nathan the prophet came and said to him, THOU SHALT NOT BUILD ME THE HOUSE (I Chron. 17:4). Why? BECAUSE THOU HAST SHED MUCH BLOOD UPON THE EARTH IN MY SIGHT (ibid. 22:8). When David heard this, he was dismayed and said, "I have become unfit to build the Temple." R. Judah said in the name of R. Il'ai: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "David, have no fear. By your life, those /whom you killed/ are as a gazelle or a hart in my sight." That's why it is written, THOU HAST SHED... UPON THE EARTH. UPON THE EARTH can only mean a gazelle or a hart, as it is said, THE UNCLEAN AND THE CLEAN MAY EAT THEREOF, AS OF THE GAZELLE, AND AS OF THE HART. ONLY YE SHALL NOT EAT OF THE BLOOD; THOU SHALT POUR IT OUT UPON THE EARTH AS WATER (Deut. 12:16-17). Another interpretation: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "By your life, all the blood which you shed in my sight was from sacrifices"; as it is written, BECAUSE THOU HAST SHED MUCH BLOOD UPON THE EARTH IN MY SIGHT / 'זָבַח / . R. Simeon b. Yohai said: 'זָבַח can only refer to sacrifices, as it is said, AND HE SHALL KILL THE BULLOCK BEFORE / 'זָבַח / THE LORD (Lev. 1:5). David said to Him, "If all this is so, why am I not to build the Temple?" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "If you build it, it will last and not be destroyed." David said to Him, "Isn't that good?" The Holy One, blessed be

2. Midrash Zuta, Ruth, p. 51.

He, said to him, "It is revealed and foreseen in my sight that the Israelites are destined to sin, and I will vent my anger upon the Temple and destroy it so that the Israelites may be saved"; as it is written, IN THE TENT OF THE DAUGHTER OF ZION HE HATH POURED OUT HIS FURY LIKE FIRE (Lam. 2:4). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "By your life, since you intended to build it, even though Solomon your son will build it, I will ascribe it to your name" -- A PSALM, A SONG AT THE DEDICATION OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID.³

According to other sources, David did more than intend to build the Temple. He gave all his energy to the project, and this is why he received credit in Ps. 30:1:

WHOSO KEEPETH THE FIG-TREE SHALL EAT THE FRUIT THEREOF (Prov. 27:18). The Holy One, blessed be He, never deprives a creature of its reward. Wherever a person wearies himself and gives his soul for something, the Holy One, blessed be He, never deprives him of his reward. You want proof? Solomon built the Temple, as it is said, SO SOLOMON BUILT THE HOUSE AND FINISHED IT (I Kings 6:14). But because David gave his soul to the Temple, that it might be built -- as it is said, LORD, REMEMBER UNTO DAVID ALL HIS AFFLICTION, etc.; "SURELY I WILL NOT COME INTO THE TENT OF MY HOUSE... I WILL NOT GIVE SLEEP TO MINE EYES... UNTIL I FIND OUT A PLACE FOR THE LORD, A DWELLING-PLACE FOR THE MIGHTY ONE OF JACOB" (Ps. 132:1-5) -- The Holy One, blessed be He, did not deprive him of his reward, but He ascribed it to his name -- A PSALM, A SONG OF DEDICATION OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID (Ps. 30:1). "Of Solomon" is not what's written here, but rather, OF DAVID.⁴

Similarly, in another reconciliation of II Sam. 7:5 (SHALT THOU BUILD) and I Chron. 17:4 (THOU SHALT NOT BUILD), the rabbis found a way

3. Pesikta Rabbati 2, pp. 7a-b; p. 6a; Yalkut Shim'oni, II Sam. 7, section 145, p. 367a.

4. Bemidbar Rabbah 12:9; Mechilta, Ha-shirah 1.

to ascribe considerable credit to David for the building of the Temple:

THOU SHALT NOT BUILD -- "You will not build it"; SHALT THOU BUILD -- "but it will be credited to your name, since were it not for you, the heavenly fire would not have descended." How is that? When the Temple was built, /Solomon/ offered a number of prayers, but the fire didn't descend. R. Helbo said in the name of the school of R. Shilo: /Solomon/ went and brought up the ark of David his father. He said to Him, "Lord of the worlds, if I have no good deeds, do this because of the good deeds of David my father." Immediately the fire descended, as it is written, O LORD GOD, TURN NOT AWAY THE FACE OF THINE ANOINTED: REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (I Chron. 6:42). What's written just after this? NOW WHEN SOLOMON HAD MADE AN END OF PRAYING, THE FIRE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN (*ibid.* 7:1). If you are unconvinced from this that Solomon brought up the ark of David from his grave, R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Helbo in the name of the school of R. Shilo: The full text is: I WILL EXTOL THEE, O LORD, THOU BROUGHTEST UP MY SOUL FROM THE NETHER-WORLD (Ps. 30:2, 4). Consequently, Solomon said, "Since the Holy One, blessed be He, did this because of the merit of David my father, I will say the song of the dedication of the Temple in his name -- A PSALM; A SONG OF DEDICATION OF THE HOUSE; OF DAVID (Ps. 30:1)."⁵

In this view, then, both Solomon and David played a role in the building of the Temple. Solomon did the actual construction, and David lent the merit of his good deeds. But elsewhere David is credited with some of the construction itself:

SHALT THOU BUILD -- "You will lay the foundation"; THOU SHALT NOT BUILD -- "but you will not complete it."⁶

Their roles were thus complementary: "/Solomon's/ father built

-
5. Pesikta Rabbati 2, pp. 6b-7a; Yalkut Shim'oni, II Sam. 7, section 144, p. 367a.
 6. Pesikta Rabbati 2, p. 6b. Yalkut Shim'oni, II Sam. 7, section 144, p. 367a.

the foundations, and he built the superstructure."⁷ Their roles were predestined: "/God showed Adam/ David laying the foundation of the Temple, and Solomon building it."⁸ And they were remembered equally as participants: "AND THE RECORDS ARE ANCIENT (I Chron. 4:22) -- this refers to David and Solomon, who collaborated before the Holy One, blessed be He, in the building of the Temple."⁹

As we read above (p. 231), David set aside much gold and silver for use in the Temple. But Solomon didn't use it. The rabbis presented two explanations for this, one favorable to David, one unfavorable, emphasizing again David's culpability:

AND SOLOMON BROUGHT IN THE THINGS WHICH DAVID HIS FATHER HAD DEDICATED, THE SILVER, AND THE GOLD, AND THE VESSELS, AND PUT THEM IN THE TREASURIES OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD (I Kings 7:51). Why didn't Solomon need them? Some interpret this as praise of David, some as condemnation. As praise: David prayed over the matter. He said, "Lord of the worlds, I can foresee through my prophecy that it is the destiny of the Temple to be destroyed. Now concerning all /the gold and silver/ which I set aside from the houses of idolatry which I have destroyed, let the idolators not be able to say, 'What did David think? He destroyed the houses of our gods and built a house for his god. Our gods bestirred themselves and collected their vengeance and destroyed the house of his god.'" So he prayed that Solomon might not need /the gold and silver/. And those who interpret it as condemnation do so because in the days of David there came a three-year-long famine. David had several storehouses piled up with silver and gold which he had appointed for the Temple. He should have spent it to sustain lives, but

7. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:16.

8. Shemot Rabbah 40:3.

9. Ruth Rabbah 2:2.

he didn't do so. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "My children are dying of famine and you are piling up wealth with which to build a building! By your life, Solomon will have no need for any of it."¹⁰

Nevertheless, another midrash at least gave David credit for collecting the gold and silver:

R. Isaac said: One who loves commandments is never sated from the commandments. How do we know?.... /From/ David. Even though the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, NEVERTHELESS THOU SHALT NOT BUILD THE HOUSE (II Chron. 6:9), David said to himself, "Just because the Holy One, blessed be He, has told me, THOU SHALT NOT BUILD THE HOUSE, shall I sit idle!" What did he do? He spurred himself on and prepared all the necessities of the Temple as long as he lived. Whence do we know this? It is said, NOW, BEHOLD, IN MY STRAITS I HAVE PREPARED FOR THE HOUSE OF THE LORD A HUNDRED THOUSAND TALENTS OF GOLD, etc. (I Chron. 22:14).¹¹

And as we read in Chapter 1 , pp. 21f, according to Masechet Kelim, Solomon did use the precious metals and jewels which David gave him.

Another way of vindicating David in regard to the Temple was to diminish the significance of the Temple itself, and so of Solomon's accomplishment. Here the comparative tendency is clear:

R. Joshua b. Levi said: Why is it written, A SONG OF ASCENTS; OF DAVID. I REJOICED WHEN THEY SAID UNTO ME: "LET US GO UNTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD" (Ps. 122:1)? David said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the universe, I have heard people saying, 'When will this old man die, so that Solomon his

10. Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 7, section 186, p. 376a; Pesikta Rabbati 6, pp. 25b-26a.

11. Devarim Rabbah 2:26-27.

son can come and build the Temple, so that we can go up for the pilgrimage?' And I rejoiced." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "FOR A DAY IN THY COURTS IS BETTER THAN A THOUSAND (Ps. 84:11). Better to Me is one day in which you occupy yourself in Torah in My sight than a thousand burnt-offerings which Solomon your son is destined to offer before Me upon the altar."¹²

But David himself had a good reason for wanting Solomon to build the Temple, according to this next midrash:

THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT (Ps. 51:19). Zivdi b. Levi said: David said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the Universe, if You will accept me in repentance, I know that Solomon my son will build the Temple and the altar and will offer upon it all the sacrifices prescribed in the Torah." It is in this light that we should read, THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT.¹³

And sure enough, at the dedication of the Temple, it became clear that God had indeed forgiven David for his sins. As we read in Chapter 1, pp. 28ff, Solomon called upon the merit of David to open the gates of the Temple (or to bring the heavenly fire). Since that tactic worked, both the Israelites and David's enemies realized that David had been forgiven for his sin (of Uriah and Bath-sheba).¹⁴ In one version, God told David beforehand that this would be the sign of His forgiveness:

R. Judah said in the name of Rav: David was

12. Makot 10a; Kohelet Rabbah 5:13; Shabbat 30a (bottom). In Ruth Rabbah 3:2, it is David's prayer which is good in God's sight.

13. Vayikra Rabbah 7:2.

14. Shabbat 30a; Midrash Tehillim 24:10; Mo'ed Katan 9a; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, section 193, pp. 376b-377a.

leprous for six months, and the Shechinah deserted him, and the Sanhedrin stayed away from him....He prayed before God, "Lord of the universe, forgive me for that sin." You can derive the "forgive" from the verse, WORK IN MY BEHALF A SIGN FOR GOOD; THAT THEY THAT HATE ME MAY SEE IT, AND BE PUT TO SHAME, BECAUSE THOU, LORD, HAST HELPED ME, AND COMFORTED ME (Ps. 86:17). God said to him, "In your own lifetime I will not make it known, but I will make it known in the lifetime of Solomon your son." When Solomon built the Temple, he sought to bring in the Ark, etc. /see Chapter 1, pp. 28ff /. REMEMBER THE GOOD DEEDS OF DAVID THY SERVANT (II Chron. 6:42). Immediately he was answered. At the same moment, David's detractors were cast down in disgrace and all Israel knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven him for that sin.¹⁵

In this next midrash, David acknowledges the Temple not as the sign of God's forgiveness, but as the reason for His forgiveness.

But here it atones for a different sin:

R. Abahu said: It is written, ANSWER ME WHEN I CALL, O GOD OF MY RIGHTEOUSNESS, THOU DIDST SET ME FREE WHEN I WAS IN DISTRESS (Ps. 4:2). David said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the worlds, You have delivered me from every strait into which I have come....I got into the distress of /taking a census/ of Israel, and You gave me the Temple."¹⁶

In another version of this midrash, though, the Temple atoned for no sin of David. Here, David received assurance from God that his not building the Temple would not be held against him:

ANSWER ME WHEN I CALL, O GOD OF MY RIGHTEOUSNESS (Ps. 4:). R. Yohanan said: Three matters caused David concern, but the

15. Sanhedrin 107a-b.

16. Y. Ta'anit 65d. I have omitted here a sentence dealing with Solomon as an atonement for David's sin with Bath-sheba. It is discussed in section III, p. 251.

Holy One, blessed be He, set his mind at ease about them. They were the Temple, the matter with Bath-sheba, and the question of Solomon's kingship. How do we know he was concerned about the Temple? It is written, LORD REMEMBER UNTO DAVID ALL HIS AFFLICTION, etc., UNTIL I FIND OUT A PLACE FOR THE LORD (Ps. 132:1-5). But the Holy One, blessed be He, set his mind at ease, as it is said, THEN DAVID SAID: 'THIS IS THE /site of/ THE HOUSE OF THE LORD GOD' (I Chron. 22:1).¹⁷

Reviewing the material as a whole, we can see that while some midrashim do castigate David for failure in regard to the Temple, the majority seek to mitigate and even remove entirely any blame which he might bear. Conversely, Solomon is regarded as morally superior in a few cases, but in most he is seen as no better than David. And as we read on page 234 above (and in Chapter 1, pp. 28ff), only with the help of David's merit was the boastful Solomon able to complete the Temple. Taken along with those midrashim in which Solomon's building helps atone for David's sins, we see a view of their relationship as symbiotic, each compensating for the deficiencies of the other. This is perhaps a negative statement of the view that they collaborated in the building of the Temple, with each receiving credit.

17. Midrash Tehillim 4:2. For the section of this midrash dealing with Solomon's kingship, see below, section III, pp. 249f.

II

The alternating approaches of comparison and equality run through other areas of the midrashic treatment of David and Solomon's relationship. This section will deal primarily with the comparative and competitive midrashim, the next with those in which the two are viewed as equals, or as harmonious.

Related to the discussion of their respective roles in building the Temple are these passages in the Zohar (quoted also in Chapter 7, pp.195ff). Here David's songs are compared to Solomon's Song of Songs. The connection with the Temple is that Solomon is here said to have composed the Song on the day when he completed the Temple:

King David sang A SONG OF DEGREES (Ps. 120: 1, 35c). King Solomon sang THE SONG OF SONGS (Song 1:1). Now what is the difference between the two? Do we not interpret both titles to signify one and the same thing? Verily, this is so, for both things are certainly one, but in the days of David all the singers of the spheres were not yet in their rightful places to chant the praises of their King, because the Temple was not as yet in existence. For, as on earth, the Levitic singers are divided into groups, so is it likewise above, and the upper correspond to the lower. But not before the Temple was erected did they assume there their due places..., and then this song /Solomon's/ was sung to the glory of the Supernal King, the "King to whom peace belongs." This song is superior to all the hymns of peace which had ever been sung before.¹

Although Solomon's song is seen as superior in the following passage as well, there are clear echoes of the collaborative view from section I, p. 234, where David built the foundations of the

1. Zohar, Shemot 143b (Soncino IV, p. 4).

Temple and Solomon built the superstructure:

King David and Solomon his son sang with quite different purposes. David endeavored to prepare the virgins (the celestial grades) and to adorn them for the Matrona's presence so that She and her maidens might be manifested in beauty and grace. When Solomon came he found the Matrona and the virgins thus adorned, so he in his turn aspired to lead the Bride to the Bridegroom. He brought the Bridegroom to the place beneath the marriage canopy the Bride awaited him, and drew them together with words of love, that they might be united as one, in one perfection, in perfect love. Therefore Solomon produced a more sublime song than all other men.²

And immediately afterwards, the collaborative view is stated clearly: "Blessed are David and Solomon his son who have furthered the Supernal Union."³

Solomon's wisdom was, of course, unexcelled by anyone. But the rabbis compared him to David in this regard, thus putting Solomon in a superior light:

R. Nehemiah said: Blessed is he who is worthy to perceive such singing /of the angels/, for, as we know and have been taught, he who is deemed worthy to comprehend this song becomes adept in doctrine and obtains wit to discern what has been and what will be. Solomon was found worthy of such knowledge, for thus taught R. Simeon: David, peace be on him, was cognizant of it, and so could compose hymns and songs, many in number, in which he hinted concerning future events. He also became richly endowed with power in the holy spirit, understood matters appertaining to the Torah and to Divine wisdom, and obtained a mastery of the holy tongue. Solomon, how-

2. Ibid., 144b-145a (Soncino IV, pp. 9-10).

3. Ibid., 145a (Soncino IV, p. 10).

ever, was gifted with a still greater knowledge of that song: he penetrated into the essence of wisdom, and so he wrote many proverbs and made a book of the song itself. This is the meaning of his words, I GOT ME MEN SINGERS / שָׂרֵי / AND WOMEN SINGERS (Eccl. 2:8); that is to say, he acquired the knowledge of the hymn sung by heavenly and terrestrial beings. And on account of this he called his book THE SONG OF SONGS: the song of the supernal songs, the song containing all mysteries of the Torah and of Divine wisdom; the song wherein is power to penetrate into things that were and things that will be; 4 the song sung by the supernal princes / שָׂרֵי /.

Solomon differed with his father on several questions, according to the midrash. And Solomon always emerged as the wiser of the two, as in this discussion of the source of wisdom:

BUT WISDOM, WHERE SHALL IT BE FOUND? (Job 28:12). This teaches that Solomon was seeking the place where wisdom is located. R. Eliezer said, in the head. R. Joshua said, in the heart. The correct opinion is that of R. Joshua, who said that wisdom is in the heart, as it is written, THOU HAST PUT GLADNESS IN MY HEART (Ps. 4:8). GLADNESS can only mean wisdom, as it is said, MY SON, BE WISE, AND MAKE MY HEART GLAD (Prov. 27:11).... David also commented upon this: CREATE ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD (Ps. 51:12). Why was wisdom placed in the heart? Because all the organs depend upon the heart. Solomon said, "I will not do as my father did. He opened his wisdom at the head of the alphabet and closed in the middle. He opened at the head, as it is said, אָשֶׁר־הָאֵל (Ps. 1:1); and he closed in the middle -- וְהָאֵל־מֵתוֹךְ (Ps. 150:6). I will not do likewise. I will open in the middle of the alphabet / מֵשֶׁלִּי (Prov. 1:1), and close at the end of the alphabet / וְהָאֵל־מֵתוֹךְ (Prov. 31:31). I open in the middle of the alphabet, in the place where wisdom is found, /just as/ wisdom is placed in the heart, which is placed in the middle of the person." You can conclude from

4. Ibid., 18b (Soncino III, pp. 59-60).

this that David held the opinion of R. Eliezer, and Solomon the opinion of R. Joshua.⁵

The competitive element is clearest in regard to Solomon's superior wisdom as a judge. Several legends exist involving judgments in which Solomon, while still a boy, wisely reverses a decision of his father. These are all included in Chapter 6 , pp. 133ff. One example should suffice here:

A poor man resolved to stay at home and be sustained by God. On a day of extreme poverty a fat cow entered his house and the poor man killed it and ate it. The rich owner claimed it and appealed to David, who ordered the poor man to pay for the loss. Solomon then asked his father to allow him to judge. He asked the rich man to forego his claim, but he refused. Solomon then invited all Israel outside Jerusalem, in order to show them his judgment. He brought a man to life who was buried under a tree and who turned out to be the father of the poor man. He had been murdered by slaves on coming home and robbed of all riches. The instigator was this very same rich man. The son then rose up, avenged his murdered father, killed the man and inherited the property which rightfully belonged to him.⁶

In one instance, however, Solomon's wisdom is seen in a less positive light than David's:

THE LORD IS FAR FROM THE WICKED (Prov. 15:29). R. Aha B. Hanina said: Come see how much harsher is the wisdom of Solomon than that of his father. David said, THE LORD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM, TO ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM IN TRUTH (Ps. 145:18). But Solomon said,

-
5. Yalkut Shim'oni, Prov. 1, section 929, p. 485b; Midrash Mishle 1, pp. 41-42; Yalkut Ha-makiri 51:15.
 6. Moses Gaster, The Exempla of the Rabbis, #353.

THE LORD IS FAR FROM THE WICKED, meaning all those who do not make complete repentance.⁷

One midrash pictures Solomon as exulting in his superiority over his father:

/I WAS GREAT,/ AND INCREASED MORE THAN ALL THAT WERE BEFORE ME IN JERUSALEM (Eccl. 2:9) and who was before him in Jerusalem? Wasn't it David his father?⁸

But another midrash seeks to put Solomon in his place:

Solomon called himself a servant /of God/, as it is said, GIVE THY SERVANT AN UNDERSTANDING HEART (I Kings 3:9). But the Holy One, blessed be He, did not call him a servant. Instead he made him dependent upon David his father, as it is said, /BUT I WILL NOT REND AWAY ALL THE KINGDOM; BUT I WILL GIVE ONE TRIBE TO THY SON,/ FOR DAVID MY SERVANT'S SAKE (I Kings 11:13).⁹

And a similar midrash underscores Solomon's dependence on David's greater merit:

Until Solomon sinned, he relied on his own merit. But after he sinned, he had to depend upon the merit of his forebears, as it is written, FOR MY SERVANT DAVID'S SAKE (I Kings 11:13).¹⁰

Thus, as with regard to the Temple, the rabbis seem ambivalent about David and Solomon's relationship. On the one hand, they acknowledged Solomon's superiority in some areas, based on the biblical history. On the other, they sought to minimize the degree of superiority, and to condemn the arrogance they felt Solomon must have displayed toward his father.

7. Midrash Mishle 15, p. 79.

8. Kohelet Rabbah 2:12.

9. Sifre Deut. 27.

10. Kohelet Rabbah 1:2.

The alternate rabbinic view pictured a harmonious relationship between David and Solomon, and spoke of them more often as equals than competitors. The following midrash, for example, places the wisdom of each on an equal level:

VANITY OF VANITIES (Ecc. 1:2). R. Huna said in the name of R. Aha: David said one thing which he didn't explain, and Solomon his son explained it. Solomon said one thing which he didn't explain, and David his father explained it. David said, MAN IS LIKE UNTO A VAPOR / **כְּאֵדָן** / (Ps. 144:4). Like what sort of vapor? If like the vapor of a furnace, there's some substance to that. Solomon his son came and explained, as it is written, VANITY / **הִבְהִיז** / OF VANITIES, SAITH KOHELET. R. Samuel b. Nahman taught in the name of R. Joshua b. Korha: It is like a man who places seven pots one on top of the other. The steam from the topmost pot has no substance to it. Solomon said, FOR WHO KNOWETH WHAT IS GOOD FOR MAN IN HIS LIFE...WHICH HE SPENDETH AS A SHADOW (Ecc. 6:12). As what kind of shadow? If as the shadow of a wall, that at least has some duration. If as the shadow of a palm-tree, that has duration. David came and explained it -- HIS DAYS ARE AS A SHADOW THAT PASSETH AWAY. (Ps. 144:4). R. Huna said in the name of R. Aha: It is as a passing bird whose shadow passes with it. Samuel said: It is as the shadow of /the wings of/ bees which has nothing to it at all.¹

Several midrashim make explicit the equality of father and son. In the following example, the passage is discussing one of Solomon's names, **יָד**:

יָד /son/ means that he was equal to his father, as it is said, AND THEY KEPT THE WARD /of Aaron according to the command/ OF THEIR GOD, AND THE WARD OF THE PURIFICATION.... /and the word of my son/ DAVID /OF SOLOMON HIS SON/ (Neh. 12:45). "And of Solomon his son" is not

1. Kohelet Rabbah 1:3. The bracketed words ("the wings of") come from Rashi.

what's written, but rather, OF SOLOMON HIS SON. This teaches that they were considered equal to each other.²

Three fathers and sons were equal one to the other. They are Abraham and Isaac, David and Solomon, and the sons of Jeriah.³

This next midrash lists several things David and Solomon had in

common:

It is written, INSTEAD OF THY FATHERS SHALL BE THY SONS (Ps. 45:17). You can find a righteous man who fathers a righteous son, a wicked man who fathers a wicked son, a righteous man who fathers a wicked son, and a wicked man who fathers a righteous son. For every case there is a biblical verse and a parable and proverb....But Solomon was a king son of a king, a wise man son of a wise man, a man of noble descent, son of a man of noble descent. You find that whatever is written of one is written of the other. David ruled forty years and Solomon ruled forty years. David ruled over Israel and Judah, and his son ruled over Israel and Judah. His father built the foundations /of the Temple/ and he built the superstructure. His father ruled from one end of the world to the other, and so did he. David wrote books and Solomon wrote books. David composed songs and Solomon composed songs. David said "vanities" and Solomon said "vanities". David said "words" and Solomon said "words". David spoke proverbs and Solomon spoke proverbs. David spoke praises beginning with the word "then", and so did Solomon. David built an altar and Solomon built an altar. David offered a sacrifice and Solomon offered a sacrifice. David brought up the Ark and Solomon brought up the Ark. /Proof texts for all these assertions follow. Then--/ R. Simon said in the name of

2. This passage is scrambled by the midrash. The first two bracketed inserts do not appear in the Bible, perhaps because the author of the midrash had a different text.

3. Mishnat R. Eliezer 5, p. 92.

R. Jonathan of the school of Guvrin, in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: If you're comparing them, compare them from all sides. Just as /David/ his father was forgiven for all his sins -- as it is said, THE LORD ALSO HATH PUT AWAY THY SIN; THOU SHALT NOT DIE (II Sam. 12:13) -- so likewise with him. And that's not all. The Holy Spirit rested upon him and he composed three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.⁴

This list omits one other similarity:

THEN SAMUEL TOOK THE VIAL OF OIL (I Sam. 10:1). Saul and Jehu were anointed from a vial, since their kingships would not endure, but David and Solomon were anointed from a horn, since their kingships would endure.⁵

David and Solomon are often mentioned together, as in the previous midrash, and always within the context of praise. In the following example, they are numbered among the Scribes:

/THE WELL, WHICH THE PRINCES DIGGER, / WHICH THE NOBLES OF THE PEOPLE DELVED (Nu. 21:18). These are the Scribes, such as David and Solomon, Daniel and Mordecai, and Ezra the Scribe.⁶

Likewise they are remembered as one pair of righteous ancestors upon whose merit Israel can draw:

יְיָנוּחַ -- this refers to Israel, who always can rely upon /יְיָנוּחַ/ the merit of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon. /The merit of each group of ancestors is said to come from one certain direction./ The merit of David and Solomon is in the north, since all their prophecy which they prophesied upon Israel was about the giving of rewards to the righteous in the Garden of Eden, which is located in the north / צִדְקָה /. How do we know that the Garden of Eden is in the north? It is said,

4. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:6; Kohelet Rabbah 1:2.

5. Midrash Shmu'el 14:5; Megillah 14a; Horayot 12a; Keritot 6a; Vayikra Rabbah 10:8.

6. Otiyot deRabbi Akiba יְיָנוּחַ, p. 49.

WHOSE BELLY THOU FILLEST WITH THY TREASURE
/or here, "in Your north," תַּיִם צָפוֹן = תַּיִם צָפוֹן/
(Ps. 17:14). David prophesied and said when
he saw how good the Garden of Eden is, OH HOW
ABUNDANT IS THY GOODNESS, WHICH THOU HAST LAID
UP / תַּיִם צָפוֹן / FOR THEM THAT FEAR THEE (Ps. 31:
20). Solomon prophesied and said, HE LAYETH
UP / תַּיִם צָפוֹן / SOUND WISDOM FOR THE UPRIGHT
(Prov. 2:7).⁷

They both sought Israel's benefit:

THE WAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS IS LIFE (Prov.
10:16). Whatever David and Solomon his
son did was for the life of Israel.⁸

They both brought fulfillment to Israel:

AND FOR THE SACRIFICE OF PEACE-OFFERINGS, TWO
OXEN / תַּיִם צָפוֹן / (Nu. 7:17). These are David
and Solomon, who initiated the kingship,
since תַּיִם צָפוֹן can only refer to kingship, as it
is said, CURD OF KINE / תַּיִם צָפוֹן /, AND MILK OF
SHEEP (Deut. 32:14). And we interpret this:
God gave them /Israel/ the booty of their
kings. תַּיִם צָפוֹן /peace-offerings/ signifies
that David and Solomon were completely
/תַּיִם צָפוֹן = תַּיִם צָפוֹן / righteous and that the
Israelites were fulfilled /תַּיִם צָפוֹן / during
their lifetimes....And they both built the
Temple -- David laid the foundation and
Solomon built it.⁹

David and Solomon are again mentioned together as leaders of
Israel in a midrash on Gen. 33:13. The phrase, THE CHILDREN ARE TENDER,
is first applied to Moses and Aaron, and the following phrase, AND THE
FLOCKS AND HERDS, is applied to Israel, making Israel the flock and

7. Ibid., p. 48.

8. Devarim Rabbah 2:20.

9. Bemidbar Rabbah 13:14. I have omitted here a reference to Solomon
above, which says that during his reign the kingdom was perfected.
See Chapter 3, p. 75.

Moses and Aaron the shepherds. Another interpretation identifies David and Solomon as the shepherds.¹⁰

Another group of midrashim emphasizes the affection between Solomon and his father. We learn that David taught his son diligently:

WHEN HE SITTETH AMONG THE ELDERS OF THE LAND (Prov. 31:23). This is David, King of Israel, who would sit and teach halacha to Solomon his son, and everyone who passed by would bless him and say, "Look at this righteous man, how he sits and teaches halacha to Solomon his son."¹¹

As a father, David was not jealous of his son, even though Solomon might outstrip him:

Raba said to Rabbah b. Mari: It is written, /THE KING'S SERVANTS CAME TO BLESS OUR LORD KING DAVID, SAYING/ GOD MAKE THE NAME OF SOLOMON BETTER THAN THY NAME, AND MAKE HIS THRONE GREATER THAN THY THRONE (I Kings 1:45). Is it polite to say such a thing to a king? He replied: They meant, in effect, "God make the name of Solomon good from thy name," etc.... This conflicts with R. Jose b. Honi, who said: Of everyone a man is jealous, except his son and his disciple. "His son" we can learn from Solomon /in the above passage/.¹²

David was concerned for his son in a number of other ways. One worry unique to their royal position was David's concern over Solomon's succession:

ANSWER ME WHEN I CALL, O GOD OF MY RIGHTEOUSNESS (Ps. 4:2). R. Yohanan said: Three matters caused David concern, but the Holy One, blessed be He, set his mind at

10. Bereshit Rabbah 33:13. See further examples in Chapter 12, p. 283f.

11. Ginzei Schechter I, p. 167.

12. Sanhedrin 105b (Soncino, pp. 719-20).

ease about them..../The third was/ the question of Solomon's kingship. The Israelites said, "Does David suppose that his dynasty will be received by the son of Bath-sheba?" But the Holy One, blessed be He, set his mind at ease. He said to him, BEHOLD, A SON SHALL BE BORN TO THEE, WHO SHALL BE A MAN OF REST; AND I WILL GIVE HIM REST FROM ALL HIS ENEMIES ROUND ABOUT; FOR HIS NAME SHALL BE SOLOMON (I Chron.22:9).¹³

David prayed on his son's behalf:

David said, "Lord of the Universe, give Your judgment to the king's son /paraphrase of Ps. 72:1/. Just as You can judge without witnesses and without warning, so let Solomon be able to judge without witnesses and without warning." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "So he shall do"; as it is said, THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD (I Chron. 29:23). /This means/ that he was able to judge, as does his Creator, without witnesses and without warning.¹⁴

David offered himself as victim in place of his son:

GIVE THY JUDGMENTS TO THE KING (Ps. 72:1). These are afflictions. David said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "I will accept the afflictions, but to Solomon, /GIVE/ THY RIGHTEOUSNESS /or "mercy"/ UNTO THE KING'S SON (ibid.)."¹⁵

David also sought to intervene with men on Solomon's behalf, even after his death:

R. Judah said in the name of Rav: /The men of the Great Assembly/ sought to include Solomon among /the wicked kings who have

13. Midrash Tehillim 4:2.

14. Ibid., 72:2. See also Chapter 4, p. 114.

15. Ibid., 72:3.

no share in the world to come/. The image of David's likeness came and prostrated itself before them, but they paid no attention to it.¹⁶

And David himself bestowed a blessing on his son, namely, THERE SHALL NO EVIL BEFALL THEE, NEITHER SHALL ANY PLAGUE COME NIGH THY TENT (Ps. 91:10).¹⁷

Solomon repaid his father's care and concern, although sometimes in symbolic ways that were beyond his control:

ANSWER ME WHEN I CALL, O GOD OF MY RIGHTEOUSNESS; THOU DIDST SET ME FREE WHEN I WAS IN DISTRESS (Ps. 4:2). David said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the world, You have delivered me from every strait into which I have come. I got into the distress of Bath-sheba, and You gave me Solomon."¹⁸

Solomon's role as a symbol of atonement for David is clearer in another version of this midrash, one we read just above on pages 249-50:

BEHOLD, A SON SHALL BE BORN TO THEE, etc., AND SOLOMON SHALL BE HIS NAME (I Chron. 22:9). R. Judah Ha-Levi said: And aren't all children born? So what does SHALL BE BORN TO THEE signify? That he will be /a sign of/ your /David's/ healing from your sin, through Nathan the prophet, as it is said, AND /the Lord/ SENT BY THE HAND OF NATHAN THE PROPHET, AND HE CALLED HIS NAME JEDIDIAH /"beloved of the Lord"/ (II Sam. 13:25).¹⁹

On a conscious level, Solomon repaid his father's care in part by acknowledging that he learned from his example:

16. Bemidbar Rabbah 14:1; Sanhedrin 104b; 53a.

17. Sanhedrin 103a. The Tosafot make explicit the connection of David and Solomon to the verse.

18. Ta'anit 11a. See also section I, p.238.

19. Midrash Tehillim 4:2.

Solomon said: "David my father said, CREATE ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD (Ps. 51:12). This was an improper request, and as soon as he realized that it was improper, he tried again, saying, WASH ME THOROUGHLY FROM MINE INIQUITY, AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN (*ibid.* 4). And how did the holy spirit respond to him? 'Since you have humbled yourself in your request, I will give you greatness.' So it says of him, THE LORD HATH SOUGHT HIM A MAN AFTER HIS OWN HEART (I Sam. 13:14)." When Solomon saw this, he said similarly, WHO CAN SAY "I HAVE MADE MY HEART CLEAN, I AM PURE FROM MY SIN"? (Prov. 20:9). What reward did he receive for this? THEN SOLOMON SAT ON THE THRONE OF THE LORD AS KING INSTEAD OF DAVID HIS FATHER (I Chron. 29:23).²⁰

David thus taught Solomon a lesson which made him worthy of being king after him. As any good father should, David tried to care for his son and prepare him for adult life; in this case, he prepared his son to follow in his footsteps. And Solomon never forgot the debt he owed to his father:

THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON THE SON OF DAVID (Prov. 1:1). Don't we already know that he was the son of David? But this is there to teach us that whatever Solomon did, he did for the honor of David.²¹

20. Soher Tov, Mishle 20.

21. Midrash Mishle 1:1; Yalkut Shim'oni, Prov. 1, section 929, p. 485b.

David's death and Solomon's succession received relatively little attention. Only one midrash deals with the moment of transition:

For the sake of a one-day-old infant who is living, one may violate Shabbat. But for David, king of Israel, when he died, one could not violate Shabbat. As Solomon said, FOR A LIVING DOG IS BETTER THAN A DEAD LION (Eccl. 9:4). R. Judah in the name of Rav explained this: Why is it written, LORD, MAKE ME TO KNOW MINE END, AND THE MEASURE OF MY DAYS, WHAT IT IS, etc. (Ps. 39:5)? David said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Lord of the universe, let me know my end." He replied, "That decree must remain My secret, since the end of a mortal cannot be made known." "The measure of my days, what it is?" He replied, "That decree /also/ must remain My secret, since the length of a mortal's life cannot be made known."

"Let me know on what day of the week I will die"/an interpretation of Ps. 39:5a/. He replied, "On Shabbat." David said, "Let me die on the day after." He replied, "The /time for the/ kingship of Solomon your son will have already arrived, and one kingship cannot overlap its successor, even a hair's breadth." He said, "Let me then die the day before Shabbat." He replied, "A DAY IN THY COURTS IS BETTER THAN A THOUSAND (Ps. 84:11). One day in which you occupy yourself with Torah is better to Me than the thousand burnt-offerings which Solomon your son is destined to sacrifice before Me on the altar." Every Shabbat David would sit and study all day. One such Shabbat the angel of death came into the garden behind David's house and shook the trees. David went out to have a look, and he climbed a ladder. The ladder broke under him, and he was silenced; his soul rested. Solomon sent to the house of study saying, "Father is dead and lying in the sun, and the dogs of Father's house are hungry. What should I do?" They sent to him saying, "Cut up some meat and give it to the dogs, and place a loaf of bread or an infant on your father, and then move him." So wasn't Solomon wise in saying,

A LIVING DOG IS BETTER THAN A DEAD LION?¹

The transition, then, was smooth and peaceful. Solomon did not push; David did not begrudge him the throne. Once in power, however, Solomon quickly established himself by replacing all of David's officers with men of his own choosing.² Also, early in his reign, Solomon had to settle some old scores for his father, specifically with Joab and Shimei b. Gera. These are discussed in Chapter 10, pp. 259-64.

One final midrash reminds us that despite all his concern for Solomon's reign, David ultimately had to leave him on his own:

WHEREFORE I PERCEIVED THAT THERE IS NOTHING BETTER, THAN THAT A MAN SHOULD REJOICE IN HIS WORKS; FOR THAT IS HIS PORTION; FOR WHO SHALL BRING HIM TO SEE WHAT SHALL BE AFTER HIM? (Eccl. 3:22). Who will bring David to see what Solomon did? Who will bring Solomon to see what happened after him, what Rehoboam did?³

1. Kohelet Rabbah 5:13; Ruth Rabbah 3:2; Makot 10a; Shabbat 30a-b.

2. Sanhedrin 57a; Berachot 65a.

3. Kohelet Rabbah 3:28.

The situations which arose in the relationship between David and Solomon may have been unique to a royal family, but the rabbis discerned in them elements common to any father-son relationship -- competition on the one hand, love and care on the other. From the comparative viewpoint, Solomon occasionally outdid his father, but he also had need of David's assistance. Ultimately the rabbis saw them both as great but flawed, neither excelling the other. As collaborators, on the other hand, they achieved great things. Their love for each other was based on mutual need. Solomon carried the hopes of his father. He would accomplish his father's unfulfilled desires. He would help clear his father's name. He would continue his father's work. Conversely, David was a nurturing, protecting presence for Solomon, during their lives and beyond. David's memory served as a genuine blessing to his son. And Solomon sought to preserve and enhance that memory.

SOLOMON AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

This chapter will discuss midrashim on Solomon's relationship with various contemporaries, foreign and domestic. First among his contemporaries was his mother Bath-sheba. According to one midrash, she was in fact almost Solomon's age, because she became pregnant with him when she was eight years old.¹ When Solomon became king, she used to sit at his right hand and listen to him expound wisdom.² When he was dethroned by Ashmedai, she told Benaiahu of Asmedai's improper advances to her, which led to the unmasking of the demon and the restoration of Solomon to the throne.³ But the most vivid midrashic picture of their relationship is the story of how Bath-sheba rebuked Solomon for oversleeping on the day of the dedication of the Temple. He had drunk too much at the celebration of his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, the previous night, and had been duped by her into oversleeping, with the keys to the Temple under his pillow⁴:

It happened that the morning offering was brought at 10 a.m. The people were distraught, because it was the day of the dedication of the Temple and they couldn't perform it, because Solomon was asleep, and they were afraid to awaken him because of their respect for the kingship. So they went and told Bath-sheba his mother, and she went and woke him up and rebuked him. It is written, THE BURDEN WHEREWITH HIS MOTHER CORRECTED HIM (Prov. 31:1). R. Yohanan said: This teaches that his mother forced him to stand up, and then she said to him, "WHAT, MY SON (*ibid.* 2). Everyone knows that your father was a God-fearing man. So now they will say, 'Bath-sheba is his mother. She must have brought him up this way.' AND

1. Sanhedrin 69b (Soncino, pp. 470-1).

2. See Chapter 4 , p. 113 .

3. See Chapter 3, pp. 101-2.

4. See Chapter 2 , pp. 59f , for the full midrash.

WHAT, O SON OF MY WOMB (*ibid.*). All the women in your father's house would stop cohabiting with the king once they became pregnant. But when I became pregnant with you, I knocked on his door and went in to cohabit with him so that my son would be pure and vigorous. AND WHAT, O SON OF MY VOWS? (*ibid.*). All the women of your father's house would vow and say, 'Let us have sons worthy of the kingship.' But I vowed and said, 'May I have a son diligent and learned in Torah and worthy of prophecy.' GIVE NOT THY STRENGTH UNTO WOMEN (*ibid.* 3), lest you chase after whoredom, and they confuse your mind, as it says, HE THAT KEEPETH COMPANY WITH HARLOTS WASTETH HIS SUBSTANCE (Prov. 29:3). NOR /give/ THY WAYS TO THAT WHICH DESTROYETH KINGS (Prov. 31:3). The Torah warned, NEITHER SHALL /the king/ MULTIPLY WIVES TO HIMSELF (Deut. 17:17). Take heed of those words, for they are the preservation of kings. IT IS NOT FOR KINGS, O LEMUEL / *למלך* / (Prov. 31:4). What have you to do with kings who say, 'What do we need with God / *מה צרכנו באלהים*?' It is not for you to do as they do. IT IS NOT FOR KINGS TO DRINK WINE (*ibid.*). Why have you lowered yourself to be as the kings who drink wine and get drunk and engage in all sorts of whoredom? Do not do as they do. NOR FOR PRINCES / *לנסיכים* / TO SAY: 'WHERE IS STRONG DRINK?' (*ibid.*). Shall you, to whom all the secrets / *סודות* / of the world are revealed, drink wine and become drunk? LEST THEY DRINK, AND FORGET THAT WHICH IS DECREED / *לפי הדין* / (*ibid.* 5)." R. Simeon said: This refers to the words of the Ten Commandments, which were engraved / *באבן* /, in which is written, THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY (Ex. 20:13). AND PERVERT THE JUSTICE DUE TO ANY THAT IS AFFLICTED (Prov. 31:5). Bath-sheba said to Solomon, "Judgment is entrusted to the kingship of the house of David, as it is said, O HOUSE OF DAVID, THUS SAITH THE LORD: EXECUTE JUSTICE IN THE MORNING (Jer. 21:12). If you drink wine, you will pervert THE JUSTICE DUE TO ANY THAT IS AFFLICTED. You will acquit the guilty and convict the innocent."⁵

Vayikra Rabbah offers some interesting additions and variations.

In that version, Bath-sheba awakens Solomon by slapping him with her slippers. Then she says:

-
5. Bemidbar Rabbah 10:4; Midrash Mishle 31 (beginning); Sanhedrin 70b; Tanhuma, Shemot 1.

"Your father married many women. When Nathan the prophet came and told him, BEHOLD, A SON SHALL BE BORN TO THEE...HIS NAME SHALL BE SOLOMON, etc. (I Chron. 22:9), each wife said to herself, 'If I can bear Solomon, I will be the one responsible for making possible the offering of all the sacrifices in the Torah.' Now here I stand with all the sacrifices in my hand, and you're sleeping!" GIVE NOT THY STRENGTH UNTO WOMEN, NOR THY WAYS TO THAT WHICH DESTROYETH KINGS (Prov. 31:3). R. Yohanan said: She said to him, "My son, the people of the generation of the Flood were kings. But because they were inundated in whoredom, they were destroyed from the earth."⁶

Solomon took his mother's rebuke to heart:

Whence do we know that Solomon repented and accepted the rebuke of his mother? It is written, SURELY I AM BRUTISH, UNLIKE A MAN, AND HAVE NOT THE UNDERSTANDING OF A MAN (Prov. 30:2).⁷

And the rebuke had a very beneficial effect upon Solomon:

Because Bath-sheba corrected Solomon, HE /became/ WISER THAN ALL MEN (I Kings 4:11).⁸

Another member of his family with whom Solomon was concerned was his brother Adonijah. Because of the latter's attempt to proclaim himself king at the end of David's life (I Kings 1), Solomon was forced to assert his claim to the throne by riding upon David's mule and by being anointed, both of which would otherwise have been unnecessary.⁹

Shimeï ben Gera became, in the midrash, a wise man, a teacher of

-
6. Vayikra Rabbah 12:5. Sanhedrin 70b adds another interpretation of /It is not/ FOR PRINCES TO SAY: 'WHERE IS STRONG DRINK?' (Prov. 31:4): "Shall you, to whose door all the princes of the world hasten, drink wine and become drunk?"
 7. Sanhedrin 70b. This midrash goes on to compare Solomon to Noah and Adam, who both made mistakes from which, Solomon admits, he should have learned. See Chapter 2, p. 60.
 8. Tanhuma, Shemot 1.
 9. See Chapter 3, p. 71.

Torah, Solomon's tutor. The following midrash establishes his credentials:

Rabbah the son of Raba said (some say it was R. Hillel the son of R. Veles): From the days of Moses until R. Judah the Prince, we haven't found a case in which one man was pre-eminent both in Torah and in secular greatness. Was there not Joshua? No, because Eleazar, /a contemporary, was equal in Torah/. Was there not Pinhas? No, because the Elders were equal in authority. Was there not Saul? No, because Samuel was his equal. But did not Samuel die before Saul? Yes, but we are referring to his whole lifetime. Was there not David? No, because there was Ira the Jairite /see II Sam. 20:26/. But he died before David. Yes, but we are referring to his whole lifetime. Was there not Solomon? No, because there was Shimei son of Gera. But Solomon killed him! Yes, but we are referring to his whole lifetime.¹⁰

While he was alive, Shimei must have been a good influence on Solomon, because when he died, Solomon erred:

R. Hiyya b. Ammi said in the name of Ula: A person should always live close to his teacher, for while Shimei ben Gera was alive, Solomon did not marry Pharaoh's daughter.¹¹

But it was Solomon himself who killed Shimei, as David had instructed him to do (I Kings 2:8-9). The Zohar added many subtleties to the story of Solomon's obedience to his father's wishes:

Among the injunctions which David on his deathbed laid upon Solomon, two were of special importance: one concerning Joab and one concerning Shimei.... Concerning Shimei he said: AND BEHOLD, THOU HAST WITH THEE SHIMEI, THE SON OF GERA (I Kings 2:8). WITH THEE means: "he is always with thee"; for he was Solomon's teacher. We read, AND THE KING SENT AND CALLED FOR SHIMEI AND SAID UNTO HIM, BUILD THEE A HOUSE IN JERUSALEM (*ibid.* 36). Where, we may ask, was the great wisdom in this? It was,

10. Sanhedrin 36a (Soncino, p. 227); Gittin 59a.

11. Berachot 8a.

indeed, wiser than in seems. Solomon did all things in wisdom; he knew that Shimei was a wise man, and he said to himself: "I desire him to spread knowledge in the land, and he therefore must not go from Jerusalem, the centre." Another thing did Solomon see in his wisdom, for it says concerning Shimei that HE CAME FORTH / הָיָא מֵהֵן / AND CURSED (II Sam. 16:5), suggesting that there were two "comings forth": one from the house of study in order to meet David and abuse him, and the second from Jerusalem to Gath to meet his servants (I Kings 2:40)...And Solomon saw by means of the Holy Spirit the second "coming forth" of Shimei, and concerning this he said to him: IT SHALL BE THAT ON THE DAY THOU GOEST OUT, AND PASSEST OVER THE BROOK KIDRON, THOU SHALT KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT THOU SHALT SURELY DIE (I Kings 2:37). Shimei "cast dust" at David (II Sam. 16:13), and Solomon referred to water when he prohibited him to cross the brook Kidron: dust and water were the means of testing the woman who was suspected of adultery (Nu. 5:11-31), and these two symbols were in the mind of Solomon when he thought of Shimei, who maligned his father. In his charge to Solomon concerning this Shimei, David said: AND BEHOLD, THOU HAST WITH THEE SHIMEI...WHO CURSED ME WITH A STRONG CURSE... AND I SWORE TO HIM BY THE LORD SAYING, I WILL NOT PUT THEE TO DEATH WITH THE SWORD (I Kings 2:8). Was Shimei, then, a fool to accept an oath like this, which forbade David only to kill him with a sword, but not with a spear or arrow? But this sentence can be taken in two ways. One is...that when David swore he swore by his sword upon which was engraved the Ineffable Name / יהוה /; and thus he swore to Shimei, as it is written: I SWORE TO HIM BY THE LORD / יהוה /...I WILL NOT PUT THEE TO DEATH (swearing) BY THE SWORD. But Solomon interpreted it differently. He said: "This man cursed my father with words; he shall die by means of a Word / דבר /." And, in fact, he did not kill him with the actual sword, but with the Name.¹²

Solomon had also to kill Joab, and that execution was complicated as well, this time by the fact that Joab sought refuge at the altar. The

12. Zohar, Shemot 107b-108a (Soncino III, pp. 327-8).

rabbis were very interested in the legal questions of this case:

YE SHALL APPOINT YOU CITIES TO BE CITIES OF REFUGE FOR YOU, THAT THE MANSLAYER THAT KILLETH ANY PERSON THROUGH ERROR MAY FLEE THITHER (Nu. 35:11). But not one who kills deliberately. If someone commits a deliberate murder, and says, "I killed accidentally," and he flees to the cities of refuge, the Holy One, blessed be He, has said, "Even if he flees to My altar, kill him"; as it is said, AND IF A MAN COME PRESUMPTUOUSLY UPON HIS NEIGHBOR, TO SLAY HIM WITH GUILF; THOU SHALT TAKE HIM FROM MINE ALTAR, THAT HE MAY DIE (Ex. 21:14). Who was this that fled to the altar and was killed? It was Joab, as it is said, AND JOAB FLED UNTO THE TENT OF THE LORD, AND CAUGHT HOLD ON THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR (I Kings 2:28). Now you find that Joab was a great scholar, and head of the Sanhedrin, as it is said, JOSHEB-BASSHEBETH A TACHEMONITE, CHIEF OF THE CAPTAINS (II Sam. 23:8). /The name יוֹשֵׁב בַּשֹּׁבֵט is taken to mean, "a wise one who sits in the assembly", referring to Joab, understood as the "chief of the captains"./ Did he not then know that it is written in the Torah, THOU SHALT TAKE HIM FROM MINE ALTAR, THAT HE MAY DIE? /He knew he couldn't save his life./ Rather, Joab said, "Those executed by the court are not buried in their family plots, but rather by themselves. It is better for me to die here /by the order of the king/, so that I will be buried with my ancestors."¹³

Another passage found different reasons for Joab's flight to the altar, knowing as he did that it would not save his life:

R. Tanhuma said: Joab fled to the Sanhedrin /which was close to the altar/, because it is taught that the estate of those executed by the court goes to the heirs, while the estate of those executed by the king goes to the king. When Solomon heard that, he said, "What do I need with his money?" So he said, DO AS HE HATH SAID, AND FALL UPON HIM AND BURY HIM; THAT THOU MAYEST TAKE AWAY THE BLOOD, WHICH JOAB SHED WITHOUT CAUSE /וְיָרַד/ (I Kings 2:31). But his money was not "without

13. Tanhuma Buber, Mas'ei 9.

cause" /חָפֵּץ, also meaning "free"; the implication being that Joab's money was not part of his guilt, and so would not be part of the punishment/.¹⁴

In another discussion of this case, the law about the inheritance is disputed. Those who maintained that Joab's estate would have gone to his heirs anyway under the law explained Joab's actions as a means of prolonging his life for the time that it took Solomon to send and receive his communiques with Joab.¹⁵

Joab did have one ace in the hole which he hoped would save his life:

AND BENAIAH BROUGHT BACK WORD UNTO THE KING SAYING, THUS SAID JOAB AND THUS HE ANSWERED ME (I Kings 2:20). Joab had said to him, "Go and tell the king: You cannot inflict a twofold punishment upon me. If you kill me, you must submit to the curses which your father uttered against me. But if you are unwilling to do that, then you must let me live to suffer from your father's curses against me." AND THE KING SAID UNTO /Benaiah/, DO AS HE HATH SAID, AND FALL UPON HIM AND BURY HIM (*ibid.* 31). Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: All the curses wherewith David cursed Joab were fulfilled in David's own descendants.¹⁶

But according to the same passage, Joab did receive a trial before Solomon, during which David's grievances against him were aired. They were the reasons David gave to Solomon in I Kings 2:5, namely, that Joab had murdered Abner and Amasa. Joab defended himself ably, even forcing Solomon to drop the matter of Abner. But Solomon caught Joab on a halachic technicality in regard to his killing Amasa.¹⁷

14. Makot 7a (see Rashi).

15. Sanhedrin 48b (Soncino, pp. 323-4).

16. *Ibid.* (Soncino, pp. 324-5); Y. Kiddushin 61a.

17. Sanhedrin 49a (Soncino, pp. 326-7).

But according to other midrashim, there was another offense for which David held Joab liable. The following midrash hints at its existence:

Among the injunctions which David on his death-bed laid upon Solomon.../was one concerning Joab/: MOREOVER THOU KNOWEST ALSO WHAT JOAB THE SON OF ZERUIA DID TO ME (I Kings 2:5). The words THOU KNOWEST indicate that even Solomon ought not really to have known this, but since others knew of it David told him also.¹⁸

What was this secret offense which David revealed to Solomon? In I Kings 2:5, David mentions only that Joab killed Abner and Amasa. But that, according to the midrashic understanding, is what Joab did to Abner and Amasa. What did he do to David? Another source gives us the answer:

MOREOVER THOU KNOWEST ALSO WHAT JOAB THE SON OF ZERUIA DID TO ME (I Kings 2:5). What did he do to David? You find that when David wrote to Joab, SET YE URIAH IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE HOTTEST BATTLE (II Sam. 11:15), Joab did so and Uriah was killed. Then all the captains of the army gathered against Joab /for having sacrificed Uriah, one of the strongest warriors/, as it is said of him, URIAH THE HITTITE. THIRTY AND SEVEN /mighty men/ IN ALL (II Sam. 23:39). So Joab showed them the letter /from David/. For that reason it is said, MOREOVER THOU KNOWEST ALSO WHAT JOAB THE SON OF ZERUIAH DID UNTO ME.¹⁹

Solomon settled one other score at the beginning of his reign, stripping Abiathar of the priesthood because he had supported Adonijah. The biblical verse in which Solomon banishes Abiathar from Jerusalem led to a midrash on the name Anathoth:

ANATHOTH, GET THEE UNTO THINE OWN FIELDS (I Kings 2:26). /The midrash reads the Hebrew literally--עָנֹתְךָ לָךְ עַל שְׂדֵיךָ. The usual reading is "Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields."/ The meaning of this verse is

18. Zohar, Shemot 107b (Soncino III, p. 327).

19. Tanhuma Buber, Mas'ei 9.

as follows. So long as King David was alive, Abiathar was wealthy and prosperous; but after David died, Solomon ordered him to get to his own fields, calling him "Anathoth". Why did he give him this name?...The real reason why Solomon called Abiathar "Anathoth" / אֲנָתוֹת / is to be found in the words, AND BECAUSE THOU WAST AFFLICTED / אֲנָתוֹת / IN ALL WHEREIN MY FATHER WAS AFFLICTED (*ibid.*); thus the name "Anathoth" alludes to the poverty and affliction which he underwent in the time of David.²⁰

Solomon's enforcer in the solidification of his rule was Benaiah ben Yehoiada. In the midrash, he became even more important to Solomon. He carried out difficult assignments, such as capturing first Ashmedai and then the Shamir.²¹ He helped Solomon regain the throne from Ashmedai.²² He was Solomon's chess opponent, even though he always lost (even at cheating).²³ In short, he was Solomon's right-hand man, almost a side-kick, but fully capable of acting on his own initiative in the king's behalf, as the following midrash attests:

I SAID: "I WILL TAKE HEED TO MY WAYS, THAT I SIN NOT WITH MY TONGUE" (Ps. 39:2). Once it happened that the king of Persia was close to death and had become extremely thin. His doctors told him, "The only cure is to get the milk of a lioness and drink that until you recover." So he sent to King Solomon, son of David, emissaries who brought with them much money. Immediately Solomon summoned Benaiah ben Yehoiada and asked him, "How can we find the milk of a lioness?" Benaiah told him, "Give me ten goats," and he and the Persian king's servants went to a lions' den. There they found a lioness nursing a cub. On

20. Zohar, Bereshit 63b (Soncino I, pp. 206-7).

21. See Chapter 1, pp. 11f. Perhaps this is why R. Judah in the name of R. Simon said that Benaiah worked with King Solomon on the building of the Temple. See Ruth Rabbah 2:2.

22. See Chapter 3, pp. 100ff.

23. See Chapter 6, pp. 141ff.

the first day he stayed at a distance, but he threw a goat to the lioness, and she ate it. On the second day he came a little closer and threw her another, and so on each day. After ten days, he could come close enough to her to play with her and to milk her teats. So he took some of her milk and went his way. They all returned to Solomon and he sent the emissaries away in peace. /The midrash continues with a fable in which the tongue proves its superiority over the other members of the body, thus justifying the opening quote from Ps. 39./²⁴

Jeroboam played a small but significant part in Solomon's life.

Indeed, it was far more significant to Jeroboam than to Solomon:

R. Yohanan said: Why did Jeroboam merit the kingship? Because he reproved Solomon. And why was he punished? Because he reproved Solomon publicly. It is said, THIS WAS THE CAUSE THAT /Jeroboam/ LIFTED UP HIS HAND AGAINST THE KING: SOLOMON BUILT MILLO, AND REPAIRED THE BREACH OF THE CITY OF DAVID HIS FATHER (I Kings 11:27). Jeroboam said to him, "David your father made breaches in the wall so that the people could come up to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals, and you have closed it up in order to take forced labor for Pharaoh's daughter!" What is the meaning of the phrase, THAT HE LIFTED UP HIS HAND AGAINST THE KING? R. Nahman said that Jeroboam took off his tefillin in front of Solomon. /Rashi explains that this was discourteous to a king, and so a sign of rebellion./²⁵

Another midrash also sees Jeroboam's rebuke as justified, but, in the end, a bad thing:

To what can we compare Esau the Wicked, Eliphaz the Temanite, Amalek his son, Jeroboam son of Nebat, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylonia, and Haman the Agagite? To a man who found a garment in the road close to a city. He picked it up and took it into the city, and went around proclaiming, "Who lost this? Who lost this?" All the people of the city gathered around him

24. Midrash Tehillim 39:2.

25. Sanhedrin 101b; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 11, section 196, p. 377a.

and said, "Have you ever seen anyone so righteous, so pious, so honest as he!?" So they made him the head of the city. In three years he destroyed the whole region. Likewise with /all those named above/...As a reward for rebuking the king /a good deed/, Jeroboam was given ten tribes /ultimately a disastrous event/.²⁶

According to one version of the story in which Solomon overslept on the day of the dedication of the Temple, it was Jeroboam who rebuked him there also. This, said the rabbis, was a serious insult to the royal dignity:

Some say that Jeroboam son of Nebat went in and rebuked him. But is that possible? R. Haggai said in the name of R. Isaac: He went and assembled eighty thousand members of his tribe /Ephraim/ and went in and rebuked him, as it is written, WHEN EPHRAIM SPOKE, THERE WAS TREMBLING, HE EXALTED HIMSELF IN ISRAEL; BUT WHEN HE BECAME GUILTY THROUGH BAAL, HE DIED (Hosea 13:1). WHEN EPHRAIM SPOKE, THERE WAS TREMBLING--when Jeroboam spoke, he made Solomon tremble. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Why are you rebuking him? He is the leader of Israel. By your life, if I were to let you taste a little of his rule, you wouldn't be able to bear up under it." And sure enough, when he ascended to the kingship, immediately it happened, WHEN HE BECAME GUILTY THROUGH BAAL, HE DIED.²⁷

In the biblical accounts, Solomon's relations with Hiram king of Tyre alternated between friction and cordiality. The scanty midrashic material reflects the same thing. Here the rabbis explained why Hiram was unhappy with the cities which Solomon ceded to him:

WHAT CITIES ARE THESE WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN ME, MY BROTHER? AND HE CALLED THEM THE LAND OF CABUL /קַבּוּל/, UNTO THIS DAY (I Kings 9:13). What is THE LAND OF CABUL? R. Huna said: It contained inhabitants who were smothered /שָׁרְפוּ/ with silver and gold. Raba said to him, "If that is so, then why is

26. Seder Eliahu Rabbah 22 (24), p. 125.

27. Vayikra Rabbah 12:5.

it written, AND THEY PLEASED HIM NOT (*ibid.* 12)?
 Because they were smothered with silver and
 gold they pleased him not!?" "That's right,"
 R. Huna replied. "Being wealthy and soft-living,
 they would do no work." R. Nahman b. Isaac said:
 It was a sandy region, and why was it called
 Cabul? Because the leg sinks into it up to the
 ankle, and people call it an ankle-bound */R?L?A/*
 land which produces no fruit.²⁸

The Zohar tells us that relations between the two were strained,
 because of Hiram's delusions of divinity, until Solomon taught him wis-
 dom.²⁹

Relations between Solomon and the Egyptian king of his day were
 always strained. The Pharaoh tried to defraud Solomon by sending him,
 to help with the Temple, craftsmen who were about to die.³⁰ This was
 Pharaoh Necho ("the Lame"), who got his name when he tried to sit on
 Solomon's throne without knowing how it worked. He was crippled by a
 blow inflicted by one of the lions built onto the throne. Pharaoh had
 taken the throne following Solomon's death, as an indemnity due under
 the terms of Solomon's marriage contract with Pharaoh's daughter.³¹
 Some sources say this king was actually Shishak. He sat waiting for
 Solomon to die, since he knew that Israel had no comparable leader.
 And after Solomon's death, he went and despoiled the Temple and the
 king's palace (II Chron. 12:9).³²

One other monarch played a significant role in Solomon's life,

28. Shabbat 54a (Soncino, p. 247).

29. See Chapter 6, p. 159.

30. See Chapter 1, pp. 16f.

31. See Chapter 4, pp. 116-18

32. Seder Olam 20, p. 30a; Aggadat Shir Ha-shirim 7:11.

namely, the Queen of Sheba. According to the biblical account (I Kings 10:1-13), she heard of his wisdom and came to test him with riddles. The rabbis filled in the details of this famous encounter:

The wood-cock came before Solomon and said, "My lord the king, I have flown all over the world to see if there was any land in the world that was not subservient to you. I found the city of Kitor, in the eastern regions, a very rich city. They drink water from the Garden of Eden. They have many soldiers, but they are ignorant of military strategy. A woman rules over them; her name is the Queen of Sheba." The king wrote a letter and gave it to the wood-cock, and it rose up into the heavens to fly to the city Kitor, and all the birds of the heavens went after it. They covered the face of the earth and darkened it. When the Queen of Sheba read the letter, she summoned her elders and ministers, who told her, "We know nothing of King Solomon and his kingdom." She ordered ships and loaded onto them cypress trees and precious stones and jewels, and six thousand young men and women all born on the same day, at the time hour, all equal in height, and dressed identically. She sent them to Solomon with a letter in which she told him that she would visit him in three years. When the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, the king sent Benaiah ben Yehoiada to meet her. He was like the morning-star in his appearance, and like a lily upon streams of water. When the Queen of Sheba saw him, she descended from her carriage. Benaiah asked her, "Why have you descended from your carriage? I am not the king, but only one of his servants." The Queen then said to her ministers, "If you do not know the lion, at least look upon its lair." Benaiah escorted her before the king. The king was sitting in a house of glass, and it looked to her as though he was sitting on water. So she lifted up her clothes to cross over the water, and the king saw that she had hairy feet. He said to her, "Your beauty is that of a woman, but your hair is that of a man." She said to him, "I will ask you three riddles. If you can solve them, I will know that you are a wise man. If not, you are only as other men." Then she said, "What is this: a wooden well and an

iron bucket, drawing out stones and giving water to drink?" The king replied, "A rouge-tube" / קוֹרֵטֵי עֵץ לְרֹאשׁוֹ. ³³ She asked another: "What comes as dust from the ground, and dust is its food, is poured out like water and lights up a house?" "Naphtha." Again she asked, "What is this: In a storm it goes ahead of all, yet it bows its head like a reed and cries out loudly; it is praise to the wealthy and disgrace to the poor, praise to the dead and disgrace to the living?" "Flax," he answered. ³⁴ Then she said, I BELIEVED NOT THE WORDS, UNTIL I CAME, AND MINE EYES HAD SEEN IT (I Kings 10:7). ³⁵

Another source gives us four more riddles:

BUT WISDOM, WHERE SHALL IT BE FOUND? (Job. 28:12). This refers to the Queen of Sheba. When she heard of Solomon's wisdom, she said, "I will go and see whether he is wise or not." How do we know that she heard of his wisdom? It is said, AND WHEN THE QUEEN OF SHEBA HEARD OF THE FAME OF SOLOMON BECAUSE OF THE NAME OF THE LORD, SHE CAME TO PROVE HIM WITH HARD QUESTIONS (I Kings 10:1). What were the "hard questions"? R. Jeremiah bar Shalom said: She said to him, "So you're Solomon. I've heard of you and your reign and your wisdom." "Yes," he said. She said, "You are a great wise man. If I ask you one thing, could you give me an answer?" He replied, THE LORD GIVETH WISDOM, OUT OF HIS MOUTH COMETH KNOWLEDGE AND DISCERNMENT (Prov. 2:6). She asked him, "What are seven that go out and nine that come in, two that pour out and one that drinks?" He answered, "Surely these are the seven days of menstruation which go out, and the nine months of pregnancy which come in, the two breasts which pour out, and the infant who drinks." "You are very wise," she said. "If I ask you

-
33. So says Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, Vol. 4, p. 148. Apparently, this was a brush used to apply eye make-up. See Jastrow under קוֹרֵטֵי .
34. Ginzberg explains this riddle in Legends, Vol. 6, p. 290, note 47. In a storm, the flaxen sails billow forward and bend and make noise. Rich wear fine flax, poor wear rags. The dead wear shrouds, the living birds steal flax-seed and living fish are caught in the nets made of flax.
35. Targum Sheni 1:3, 10. My version is taken from the Hebrew translation in Hasidah's Ishei Ha-tanach, p. 403.

something else, could you answer me?" He replied, THE LORD GIVETH WISDOM. She asked, "Who is the woman who said to her son, 'Your father is my father, your grandfather is my husband, you are my son, and I am your sister'?" He answered, "Surely these are the two daughters of Lot /see Gen. 19:30-38/." She tried another test. She brought before him young people of the same height, dressed identically, and she said to him, "Distinguish for me the males from the females." He signalled to his eunuchs and they brought him nuts and parched corn. He distributed it to the youths. The males, who were not shy, gathered the food onto their clothes, but the females, who were shy, gathered it with their scarves. So Solomon said, "These are the males, those the females." "My son, you are very wise." And she tried one other test. She brought uncircumcised and circumcised men, and said to him, "Distinguish for me the circumcised from the uncircumcised." So he signalled to the high priest, who opened the ark of the covenant. The circumcised among them bowed to half their height, and their faces were filled with the splendor of the Shechinah. But the uncircumcised among them fell on their faces. So Solomon said, "These are the uncircumcised, those are the circumcised." "Where did you learn this /i.e., that the uncircumcised cannot stand before the divine presence/?" she asked. "From Balaam," he said, "as it is written, WHO SEETH THE VISION OF THE ALMIGHTY, FALLEN DOWN YET WITH OPENED EYES (Nu. 24:4). If he had not fallen, he wouldn't have been able to see anything." And if you don't want to derive it from Balaam, derive it then from Job. When Job's three friends came to console him, he said to them, I HAVE UNDERSTANDING AS WELL AS YOU; I AM NOT INFERIOR TO YOU /וְעָלַי חָכְמָה כְּכֶם וְאֵינִי נִדְחָה מִכֶּם/. Then Sheba said to Solomon, I BELIEVED NOT THE WORDS, UNTIL I CAME, AND MINE EYES HAD SEEN IT, etc. (I Kings 10:7ff).³⁶

According to one legend, Solomon's relationship with the Queen of Sheba was physical as well as intellectual:

-
36. Midrash Mishle 1, pp. 40-41. In Legends, Vol. 4, pp. 145-9, Ginzberg presents twenty-two riddles, including the seven recorded here. Zohar, Bemidbar 194b (Soncino V, pp. 276-7), says that Sheba also asked Solomon "how to take hold of the bone of the serpent of three enchantments," a question Solomon answered from the occult knowledge imparted to him by Ashmedai (see Chapter 3, p. 94).

/Ben Sira said to Nebuchadnezzar/: This is what happened in the days of your forebear. Solomon in his wisdom created /a depilatory/. When your forebear the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon and brought him gifts in order to see his wisdom, he found her attractive and wished to lie with her, but he found her covered with hair.³⁷ So he brought lime and arsenic and crumbled them with choppers on the sole of his foot and ground up the arsenic and mixed them with water, making a lotion of lime as a depilatory. Then he spread it on her and rinsed her off, and her hair fell off. Then he had intercourse with her.³⁸

But R. Yohanan took issue with the whole body of legend about the Queen of Sheba:

R. Yohanan said: Anyone who says that the Queen of Sheba was a woman is mistaken. Read not "the Queen of Sheba" / מלכות שבא /, but rather, "the kingdom of Sheba" / מלכות שבא / . For in the days of Solomon, the kingdom of Sheba came to serve Israel, as it is said, BECAUSE OF THE NAME OF THE LORD (I Kings 10:1).³⁹

-
37. In Legends, Vol. 6, p. 289, note 41, Ginzberg says that she was hairy because she was a demoness. This also explains her interest in the occult, referred to in the previous note.
38. Alpha Beita deVen Sira (Otsar Midrashim, p. 46). This midrash implies that Nebuchadnezzar was a descendant of this union.
39. Midrash Ha-gadol, Hayei Sarah 6, pp. 379-80. See also Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 10, section 195, p. 377a, and Baba Batra 15b, which attribute this to R. Jonathan.

In various biblical passages, Solomon is referred to by a variety of names. The rabbis found special meanings in each of these names. This chapter presents those midrashic interpretations.

One midrash lists seven different names for Solomon:

Solomon was called by three names: Yedidiah, Kohelet and Solomon. R. Joshua b. Levi said seven: Agur, Ben Yakeh, Lemuel and Itiel /in addition to the first three--cf. Prov. 30:1/. R. Samuel bar Nahman said: Three of these were actual names: Yedidiah, Kohelet and Solomon. R. Samuel in the name of R. Nahman said that the other four were nicknames which required explication. Agur /אגור/ means that he amassed /אגד/ words of Torah. Yakeh /יכה/ means that he vomited up /הקיא/ words of Torah, as a cup which is first full and then is emptied. Lemuel /למול/ means that he spoke to God /לאלהים/ and said, "I can multiply wives to myself and not sin." Itiel /איתאל/ means that he said, "God is with me /אל עמי/, so I can do anything" /אעשה/, playing on another name, אצל, in Prov. 30:1.¹

Another midrash interprets Solomon's four "nicknames" from Prov.

30:1 in a positive way:

THE WORDS OF AGUR THE SON OF JAKEH; THE BURDEN. THE MAN SAITH UNTO ITHIEL, UNTO ITHIEL AND UCAL (Prov. 30:1). THE WORDS OF AGUR are the words of Solomon, who girded up his loins /אגד/ = אגד חזקו /אורח חיים/ for wisdom. THE SON OF JAKEH /יכה/ means that he was innocent /נקי/ of all sin and transgression. THE BURDEN /המשא/ means that he bore /נשא/ the yoke of the Holy One, blessed be He. THE MAN SAITH means that the Holy Spirit rested upon him. UNTO ITHIEL /איתאל/ means that he understood the letters of God /אותיותיו של אל/. Another interpretation is that he understood the letters of the ministering

-
1. Bemidbar Rabbah 10:4; Kohelet Rabbah 1:2; Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 1:10; Tanhuma Va'era 5. Tanhuma Buber, Va'era 2, p. 18, includes an explication of יכה from בן יכה. It means that Solomon understood /הבין/ the words of Torah. On Solomon and Torah see Chapter 6, section VII. On Solomon's wives and sins, see Chapter 2.

angels. AND UCAL / **לצל** / means that he was able / **לצל** / to bear the power of the letters.²

Almost all of these names received individual attention from the rabbis. Here are the midrashim on the name Solomon:

Six people were named /in the Bible/ before their birth, namely, Isaac, Ishmael, Moses our teacher, Solomon, Josiah and the name of the Messiah whom the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring speedily in our days....How do we know this of Solomon? It is said, BEHOLD, A SON SHALL BE BORN TO THEE, WHO SHALL BE A MAN OF REST; AND I WILL GIVE HIM REST FROM ALL HIS ENEMIES ROUND ABOUT; FOR HIS NAME SHALL BE SOLOMON / **שמואל** /, AND I WILL GIVE PEACE / **שלום** / AND QUIETNESS UNTO ISRAEL IN HIS DAYS (I Chron. 22:9).³

THUS ALL THE WORK WAS FINISHED (I Kings 7:51). "The work" is not what's written here, but rather, ALL THE WORK, meaning the work of the six days of Creation, as it says, HE RESTED FROM ALL HIS WORK WHICH GOD IN CREATING WAS MAKING (Gen. 2:3). "Had made" / **עשה** / is not what's written here, but rather, WAS MAKING / **עושה** /, meaning there was still some work remaining. When Solomon came and built the Temple, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Now the work of heavens and earth is complete" / **שקלול** = **שקלול** /--THUS ALL THE WORK WAS FINISHED. For that reason he was called Solomon / **שלום** /, because the Holy One, blessed be He, completed / **שקלול** / the work of the six days of Creation through his efforts.⁴

There is only one midrash explaining the name Kohelet:

Why was he called Kohelet / **קהלת** /? Because he spoke his words in public / **בקהל** /, as it is said, THEN SOLOMON ASSEMBLED / **קהל** / THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL (I Kings 8:1).⁵

The name Yedidiah figures in two related midrashim:

-
2. Midrash Mishle 30 (beginning).
 3. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer 33. Y. Berachot 4a omits Moses and the Messiah. Bereshit Rabbah 45:8 further omits Ishmael.
 4. Pesikta Rabbati 6, p. 25a.
 5. Kohelet Rabbah 1:2.

Let the beloved, son of the beloved, come and build the beloved for the Beloved in the portion of the beloved, that the beloved may find atonement therein. "Let the beloved come" refers to King Solomon, as it is written, AND /God/ SENT BY THE HAND OF NATHAN THE PROPHET, AND HE CALLED /Solomon's/ NAME JEDIDIAH /"beloved of the Lord"/ (II Sam 12:25). /The midrash goes on to identify the other "beloveds" as, in order, Abraham, the Temple, God, Benjamin and Israel./⁶

The second midrash, a variant of this one, also lists six "beloveds" /שש ידובים/, substituting Jerusalem for the Temple. Then it continues:

Five were called "loved ones" /חמשה ידובים/: Abraham...; Jacob...; Israel...; Solomon is called a "loved one" /ידוב/, as it is said, DID NOT SOLOMON KING OF ISRAEL SIN BY THESE THINGS?...AND HE WAS BELOVED /ידוב/ OF HIS GOD (Neh. 13:26); and the gates of Jerusalem...⁷

The name Agur appears in a midrash on three of the names:

Solomon was called by many names, but three of them are preferable, because they all connote the same thing. They are Solomon, Agur and Kohelet, and the three of them are about peace. FOR HIS NAME SHALL BE SOLOMON /שלמה/ (I Chron. 22:9). Why? Because I WILL GIVE PEACE /שלום/ AND QUIETNESS UNTO ISRAEL IN HIS DAYS (*ibid.*). Kohelet and Agur are words for assembly, for all Israel were gathered together in Solomon's days and there was peace among them, as it is said, AND JUDAH AND ISRAEL DWELT SAFELY...ALL THE DAYS OF SOLOMON (I Kings 5:5). No one robbed another and no one did violence to another. How were they restrained from robbery? By the fact that Solomon judged the case of the harlots without witnesses. Everyone was amazed and said, "Who can judge without witnesses!?" So they restrained themselves from robbery, as it is said, AND ALL ISRAEL

6. Menahot 53a-53b; Yalkut Shim'oni, Ex. 2, section 166, p. 54a.

7. Avot deRabbi Nathan, Nusha 2, Perek 43.

HEARD OF THE JUDGMENT WHICH THE KING HAD JUDGED;
AND THEY FEARED THE KING (I Kings 3:28). They
said, "We can't get away with robbing anybody."
So there was peace among them. This teaches
that peace is great, inasmuch as the Holy One,
blessed be He, exalted Solomon with it, as it
is said, I WILL GIVE PEACE AND QUIETNESS UNTO
ISRAEL IN HIS DAYS.⁸

But there are several passages which discuss Agur alone:

Agur is Solomon. Why was he called Agur? R.
Judah ha-Nasi said: Agur connotes gathering,
teaching that Solomon's wisdom was gathered up
within him and he didn't have to search after
it. In the same sense it is said, A WISE SON
GATHERETH IN SUMMER (Prov. 10:5), and BUT THOU
SHALT NEITHER DRINK OF THE WINE, NOR GATHER
THE GRAPES (Deut. 28:39).

Another interpretation of Agur is that
Solomon assembled all Israel, as it is said,
THEN SOLOMON ASSEMBLED THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL,
etc. (I Kings 8:1). This teaches that Israel
in its fullness assembled before him, the
priests, the Levites, and the Israelites.
You find that in the days of Hezekiah, the
Levites and the Israelites were present in
sufficient number, but not the priests, as it
is said, BUT THE PRIESTS WERE TOO FEW, etc.
(II Chron. 29:34). And it is written, FOR
THEY COULD NOT KEEP /the Passover/ AT THAT
TIME, BECAUSE THE PRIESTS HAD NOT SANCTIFIED
THEMSELVES IN SUFFICIENT NUMBER, NEITHER HAD
THE PEOPLE GATHERED THEMSELVES TOGETHER IN
JERUSALEM (II Chron. 30:3). In the days of
Ezra, the priests and Israelites were present
in sufficient number, but not the Levites, as
it is said, AND I GATHERED THEM TOGETHER...AND
I VIEWED THE PEOPLE, AND THE PRIESTS, AND FOUND
THERE NONE OF THE SONS OF LEVI (Ezra 8:15). In
the days of Nehemiah, the priests and the
Levites were present in sufficient number, but
not the Israelites, as it is said, NOW THE CITY
WAS WIDE AND LARGE; BUT THE PEOPLE WERE FEW
THEREIN (Neh. 7:4). But in Solomon's case,
they were present in their fullness, as it is
said, THEN SOLOMON ASSEMBLED...AND ALL THE MEN
OF ISRAEL ASSEMBLED THEMSELVES UNTO KING SOLOMON
(I Kings 8:1-2).

Another interpretation is that he was called

8. Mishnat R. Eliezer 4, pp. 66-7.

Agur / אגור / because all the words of his prophecy pertained to the reward / תג / of the righteous and the giving of their deserts. So he says, WHOSO KEEPETH THE FIG-TREE SHALL EAT THE FRUIT THEREOF (Prov. 27:18); and A MAN SHALL EAT GOOD FROM THE FRUIT OF HIS MOUTH (Prov. 13:2); and GIVE HER OF THE FRUIT OF HER HANDS (Prov. 31:31)....

Another interpretation of Agur / אגור / is that it refers to the agorah / אגורא = penny/, which is the gerah /an ancient coin/, as it is said, EVERY ONE...SHALL COME AND BOW DOWN TO /God's priest/ FOR A PIECE OF SILVER /חצי שקל/. And it says, THE SHEKEL IS TWENTY GERAHS (Ex. 30:13). This teaches that Solomon's wisdom was broad and deep, and that he kept close account of each shekel and gerah.⁹

Solomon in his many guises is referred to as the son of several people. His designation as a son itself provoked comment:

בן /son/ is one of Solomon's names, meaning that he understood / תבונה / subtleties. How do we know? When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, ASK WHAT I SHALL GIVE THEE (I Kings 3:5), he thought, "What shall I request? Wealth, possessions, honor, victory, strength? If I choose one, I will still lack the others. So let me request wisdom, in which all else is included--wealth and honor and long life; as it is said, LENGTH OF DAYS IS IN /wisdom's/ RIGHT HAND / ב ימין /; IN HER LEFT /שמאלה/ ARE RICHES AND HONOR (Prov. 3:16). This actually means that those who are faithful / נאמנים /, play on תבונה / and who observe the Torah for its own sake will receive length of days, namely, everlasting life. But those who are underhanded / עושה שמאלה, lit., "who use the left hand"/ and do not observe Torah for its own sake may receive riches and honor, but not length of days. And how do we know that wisdom includes victory and strength? It is said, NO WEAPON THAT IS FORMED AGAINST THEE SHALL PROSPER (Is. 54:17).

Another interpretation of "son" is that the Holy One, blessed be He, called him "son", as it is said, I WILL BE TO HIM FOR A FATHER, AND HE SHALL BE TO ME FOR A SON (II Sam. 7:14)....¹⁰

Another interpretation of "son" is that

9. Mishnat R. Eliezer 4, pp. 65-66, 88.

10. For the continuation of this midrash, see Chapter 3, pp. 82f.

Solomon was considered equal to his father. So it says, AND THEY KEPT THE WARD OF THEIR GOD... ACCORDING TO THE COMMANMENT OF DAVID, OF SOLOMON HIS SON (Neh. 12:45). "And of Solomon his son" / **וְיָמְלֹךְ בְּנוֹ** / is not what's said, but rather, OF SOLOMON HIS SON / **וְיָמְלֹךְ בְּנוֹ** /. This teaches that they were considered equal.¹¹

Another midrash commented on Solomon's designation as "the son of David" in Prov. 1:1:

Don't we all know that Solomon was the son of David? This really indicates that whatever Solomon did, he did for the glory of David.¹²

The rabbis explained the name Lemuel within the context of the story of Bath-sheba's rebuke of Solomon for oversleeping on the day of the dedication of the Temple. See Chapter 10, p. 257.

Finally, the name Itiel taught a lesson about Solomon, not intrinsically, but because it was repeated:

Anyone whose name is repeated in the Bible has a share in the world to come and in this world. There are eight such people, namely, Noah, Shem, Terah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel and Solomon....whence do we know it of Solomon? It is written, THE WORDS OF AGUR SON OF JAKEH... UNTO ITIEL, ITIEL AND UCAL (Prov. 30:1).¹³

11. Mishnat R. Eliezer 5, pp. 91-92.

12. Yalkut Shim'oni, Prov. 1, section 929, p. 485b.

13. Mishnat R. Eliezer 8, p. 143.

I

In the first section of this chapter, we discuss midrashim which name Solomon as the authority for various customs and rituals. The second section presents miscellaneous midrashim, including several addenda to earlier chapters.

The rabbis credited Solomon with originating several customs and halachic practices. For example, the custom of having ten elders decide questions of the calendar was traced back to Solomon, who consulted with Gad the seer, Nathan the prophet and seven other elders.¹ The rabbis also credited Solomon with instituting the custom of a festive meal upon the completion of the studying of Torah:

Immediately /after receiving wisdom, understood as full knowledge of Torah--I Kings 3:4-14/, HE /Solomon/ CAME TO JERUSALEM...AND MADE A FEAST FOR ALL HIS SERVANTS (I Kings 3:15). R. Isaac said: From this we learn that one should make a feast upon the completion of Torah.²

Solomon set the example for etiquette when leaving the presence of the holy, and the learned:

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Scripture said, SO SOLOMON CAME TO THE HIGH PLACE THAT WAS AT GIBEON...UNTO JERUSALEM (II Chron. 1:13). What has Gibeon to do with Jerusalem? The text compares his departure from Gibeon towards Jerusalem with his entrance from Jerusalem into Gibeon, i.e., just as when he entered Gibeon from Jerusalem his face was directed towards the high place, in the same way as he had come in; in the same manner as he left Gibeon for Jerusalem his face turned toward the high place even in the same way as when he had come in. In similar manner the priests as they ministered, the Levites on their service, the Israelites on their posts--as they left they would not turn

1. Shemot Rabbah 15:20. For the full text, see Chapter 6, p. 230.

2. Kohelet Rabbah 1:1.

their face back, to go out, but would turn their face sideways to leave. Thus also a disciple taking leave of his master, must not turn his face back to go away, but must turn sideways to depart.³

The celebration of the dedication of the Temple, coming as it did just before the celebration of Sukkot, taught the rabbis the principle that one should not mingle two joyous occasions, because on that occasion, the Israelites forgot to observe Yom Kippur.⁴

Some practices with legal implications were also credited to Solomon. In the following example, a verse from one of Solomon's books is the link:

/The permission/ to use the paths in private fields is /implied in/ a statement made by Solomon, as taught: If a man's produce has already been removed entirely from the field, and nevertheless he does not allow persons to enter his field, what would people say of him if not, "What /real/ benefit has that owner from his field, for in what way would people do him any harm?" It was regarding such a person that the verse says: While you can be good do not call yourself bad. But is it /anywhere/ written: "While you can be good do not call yourself bad"? Yes, it is written to a similar effect: WITHHOLD NOT GOOD FROM HIM TO WHOM IT IS DUE, WHEN IT IS IN THE POWER OF THY HAND TO DO IT (Prov. 3:27).⁵

According to tradition, Solomon instituted the practices of the ritual cleansing of the hands and the eruv:

R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: When Solomon instituted the eruv and the washing of hands, a heavenly voice went forth and said, MY SON, IF THY HEART BE WISE, MY HEART

3. Yoma 53a (Soncino, p. 249).

4. Mo'ed Katan 9a. For the full text, see Chapter 1, p. 42.

5. Baba Kama 81b (Soncino, p. 464).

WILL BE GLAD, EVEN MINE (Prov. 23:15), and
MY SON, BE WISE, AND MAKE MY HEART GLAD,
THAT I MAY ANSWER HIM THAT TAUNTETH ME
(Prov. 27:11).⁶

Elsewhere, the rabbis alluded to Solomon's decree as being a
decree of the Scribes, implying that Solomon was considered a Scribe.⁷

Solomon collaborated with his father in shaping a benediction
that became a fixture:

When the people entered the land of Israel,
David and Solomon instituted the "Builder
of Jerusalem" benediction /in the grace
after meals/. David ordained the part,
"Have compassion upon Israel Your people,
and upon Jerusalem Your city." Solomon
ordained the part, "and upon the great and
holy house upon which Your name is called."⁸

Solomon set other patterns for the liturgy as well. The twenty-
four benedictions in the Tefillah for a fast day are derived by
tradition from Solomon's twenty-four "prayers" when he sought to bring
the Ark into the Temple.⁹ Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the
Temple reinforced the pattern of preceding and following supplication
with praise of God.¹⁰

One aspect of Solomon's life, his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter,
created a halachic problem, rather than a pattern, for the rabbis,
since a first-generation Egyptian was forbidden as a spouse (Deut.
23:9). The rabbis resolved the problem by asserting that Solomon did

6. Shabbat 14b-15a; Eruvin 21b.

7. Yadayim 3:2.

8. Berachot 48b.

9. Berachot 29a. See Chapter 1, p. 33.

10. Berachot 31a; Yalkut Shim'oni, I Kings 8, sections 190 and 192,
pp. 376a-b; Sifre Deut. 343.

not actually marry her, but only loved her as much as if they had, in fact, been married.¹¹

11. Yevamot 76a-b (Soncino, pp. 514-5). For the full text, see Chapter 2, p. 64.

This section gathers together miscellaneous statements about Solomon, some of which are addenda to earlier chapters. Most are complimentary. Some allude to the magnificence of his reign:

THOSE THAT DWELL AMONG PLANTATIONS / עֲצֵי הָעֵץ /
(I Chron. 4:23)--this refers to Solomon, who
was like a flourishing tree / עֵץ הַחַיִּים / in his
reign.¹

THOU ART CLOTHED WITH GLORY AND MAJESTY (Ps.
104:1). If a mortal is strong, /usually/
he is not beautiful, and if he is handsome,
he is /usually/ not strong, but the Holy
One, blessed be He, is both mighty and
beautiful. He possesses two things, glory
and majesty. He gave glory to Moses....He
gave majesty to Joshua....He gave glory
/ כְּדָר / to Solomon, as it is said, AND THE
LORD MAGNIFIED SOLOMON EXCEEDINGLY IN THE
SIGHT OF ALL ISRAEL, AND BESTOWED UPON HIM
SUCH ROYAL GLORY / כְּדָר / AS HAD NOT BEEN
ON ANY KING BEFORE HIM IN ISRAEL (I Chron.
29:25).²

Others allude to him as the builder of the Temple:

THEN SHALL THE OFFERING OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM
BE PLEASANT UNTO THE LORD, AS IN THE DAYS OF
OLD, AND AS IN ANCIENT YEARS (Mal. 3:4). AS
IN THE DAYS OF OLD refers to the days of Moses,
AND AS IN ANCIENT YEARS refers to the days of
Solomon.³

ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL; THERE IS ONE
EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND TO THE WICKED...
TO HIM THAT SACRIFICETH AND TO HIM THAT
SACRIFICETH NOT (Eccl. 9:2). TO HIM THAT
SACRIFICETH refers to Solomon, as it is
said, SOLOMON OFFERED THE SACRIFICE OF PEACE-
OFFERINGS (I Kings 8:63). TO HIM THAT
SACRIFICETH NOT refers to Jeroboam, who
stopped Israel from going up to the Temple
for the pilgrim festivals, as it is said,

1. Baba Batra 91b; Ruth Rabbah 2:2.

2. Midrash Tehillim 104:5. On the subject of Solomon's reign, see Chapter 3, pp. 70ff.

3. Vayikra Rabbah 7:4; Eichah Rabbah 5:23.

YE HAVE GONE UP LONG ENOUGH TO JERUSALEM (I Kings 12:28). Yet this one was king after that one /i.e., they shared the same fate, both becoming king/.⁴

There were four biblical characters whose prayers were answered immediately--Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon....How do we know it of Solomon? It is said, NOW WHEN SOLOMON HAD MADE AN END OF PRAYING, THE FIRE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN (II Chron. 7:1). But they were answered only for their own need. As for requests to have the Shechinah dwell with them, the Shechinah only dwelled in response to the prayer of Moses and Solomon.⁵

One midrash tells of Solomon's devotion to his people:

THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON THE SON OF DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL (Prov. 1:1). Doesn't everyone already know that he was king of Israel? Rather, this teaches that whatever he did, he did for the glory of Israel.⁶

Solomon was often remembered along with his father David, always fondly⁷:

AND HEZEKIAH SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS, AND THEY BURIED HIM IN THE ASCENT OF THE SEPULCHRES OF THE SONS OF DAVID (II Chron. 32:33). R. Eleazar said: IN THE ASCENT /*al pi ha'et*/ means next to the most praised /*al pi ha'et*/ in the family, namely, David and Solomon.⁸

Our masters taught: What was inscribed on the coins of Jerusalem? David and Solomon on one

-
4. Tanhuma, Aharei Mot 1; Yalkut Shim'oni, Eccl. 9, section 989, p. 546a.
 5. Mishnat R. Eliezer 6, p. 116; Bereshit Rabbah 60:4. The latter source provides the logical proof-text as given. The proof-text in the first source, I Kings 8:54, is inconclusive. On the subject of Solomon as builder of the Temple, see Chapter 1, section I.
 6. Midrash Mishle 1:1 (end); Yalkut Shim'oni, Prov. 1, section 929, p. 485b. See also Chapter 9, pp. 248 and 252.
 7. See also Chapter 9, pp. 247ff.
 8. Baba Kama 16b.

side, and Jerusalem the holy city on the other.⁹

The two of them, David and Solomon, were also remembered along with other early leaders:

Who were the "first prophets"? R. Huna said: These were David and Samuel and Solomon.¹⁰

R. Isaac opened with the verse, WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS ARE INCREASED, THE PEOPLE REJOICE; BUT WHEN THE WICKED BEARETH RULE, THE PEOPLE SIGH (Prov. 29:2). When the righteous take up authority, there is joy and happiness in the world, there is wah! wah! /a cry of joy/ in the world. So it says, NOW KING DAVID / וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה / (I Kings 1:1), as if to say, wah! that David is become king. NOW KING SOLOMON / וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה / (*ibid.* 11:1), as if to say, wah! that Solomon is become king. /Asa and Cyrus are also included among the righteous kings. They are then contrasted with the wicked kings Ahab, Hosea, Zedekiah, and Ahasuerus, who made the people groan with the exclamation vai./¹¹

THE FLOWERS APPEAR ON THE EARTH (Song 2:12). THE FLOWERS are the kings--David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah and Asa.¹²

One other such list of the kings is unusual in that David and Solomon are subordinated to another king:

Every seventh king is the favorite....Among the kings the seventh was the favorite: Saul, Ish-boseth, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa; as it is written, AND ASA CRIED UNTO THE LORD HIS GOD (II Chron. 14:10).¹³

These final midrashim are addenda to various chapters. They are

9. *Ibid.* 97b.

10. Sotah 48b. The "first prophets" are also mentioned in Yoma 53b.

11. Esther Rabbah, Proem 7 (Soncino, p. 8).

12. Shemot Rabbah 15:1.

13. Vayikra Rabbah 29:11.

quoted as they appear in Hasidah's Ishei Ha-tanach, because for one reason or another they were inaccessible to this writer in their original sources.

The first of these addenda sheds additional light on the relationship between Solomon's wisdom and his spiritual state:

THE LORD APPEARED TO SOLOMON IN A DREAM (I Kings 3:5), because Solomon was not yet in a state of spiritual wholeness. But once he had become whole, it is written, AND GOD GAVE SOLOMON WISDOM (ibid. 5:9). Then Solomon perceived wisdom, as it were, eye to eye; he had no need for dreams. But after he sinned, he again needed dreams as before. So it is written, /God/ HAD APPEARED UNTO /Solomon/ TWICE (ibid. 11:9). Was it only twice and no more? This refers to God's appearing to him twice in dreams, because through his involvement with foreign women, he failed to keep the covenant of holiness.¹⁴

Another midrash provides another apology for Solomon's marriages to so many women. Note that it does not mention the fact that they were foreign women:

Why did Solomon marry a thousand women? So that he could have a thousand sons every year, a son from each wife. In twenty years he would have twenty thousand sons, so that no creature and no man could rule over him or do him any harm.¹⁵

These two last midrashim add to the accounts of Solomon's mastery over the animal world:

The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Solomon dominion over the beasts of the earth and the birds of the heavens, over those that creep

14. Zohar, Bereshit 150 (Ishei Ha-tanach, p. 412). See Chapter 6, p. 178.

15. Batei Midrashot II, 451 (Ishei Ha-tanach, p. 411). See Chapter 2, p. 63.

upon the earth, and over spirits and demons, and he understood the language of all of them, and they understood him, as it is written, HE SPOKE ALSO /to/ BEASTS, AND FOWL, AND CREEPING THINGS, AND FISHES (I Kings 5:13). When the king was merry he would have them brought before him, and his scribes would call them by name, and they would all gather and come before him, without chains or keepers, and they would dance before him in order to display his greatness before the peoples who stood before him.¹⁶

Indeed, so great was Solomon's mastery that he could command animals to give up their lives for his nourishment:

All the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens, the cattle and the beasts of the field together would go up to the slaughterhouse to be slaughtered for Solomon's meal.¹⁷

16. Targum Sheni 1:3 (Ishei Ha-tanach, p. 403). See Chapter 3, p. 85.

17. Targum Sheni 1:1 (Ishei Ha-tanach, p. 404). See Chapter 3, p. 85, and Chapter 8, p. 224.

CONCLUSION

King Solomon is a fabulous figure in the Bible. His wealth, his wisdom and his power are all described in superlatives. This larger-than-life figure stirred the rabbinic imagination. They wanted to define for themselves: how rich was he? how wise? how powerful? They sought to understand and express the full extent of his unparalleled worldly success. On this level, Solomon was a heroic figure, a symbol of the zenith of Israel's own strength and prosperity.

But, of course, the ultimate criterion for the rabbis was not Solomon's wealth, or his power, or even his wisdom. It was his obedience to God's commands. Here he failed, again in spectacular fashion. His violations were flagrant, even monumental. And the effects of his transgression showed up in every area of his life, especially his wealth, wisdom and power; they were all diminished after he sinned.

Solomon did, of course, have one great religious triumph to recommend him. His building of the Temple, a transcendent structure, helped tip the scales of rabbinic opinion in his favor. And, in fact, in spite of the constant reminders of Solomon's sins, and his tendency to arrogance, the rabbis always saw Solomon as a positive figure. They never pictured him as villainous. His sins were usually portrayed as errors into which anyone so privileged could have fallen.

These five elements--his wealth, wisdom and power, his sins, and his building of the Temple--form the core of Solomon's life in the eyes of the rabbis. They are motifs which run through the other chapters of this work. Solomon's relationships with David and his contemporaries revolve around these five elements. Solomon's utterances in his three books are reflections upon his experience in these five areas. His

many names were symbolic of these primary elements in his life.

As a vehicle for homiletical instruction, the character of Solomon offered rich potential. The Bible indicated that he epitomized certain human possibilities. The rabbis went further, developing Solomon's character in every direction. In the Bible, Solomon was a symbol of wealth, wisdom and power. In the midrash, he became a symbol of extravagance, folly and humiliation as well. He was humble, he was arrogant. He built the Temple, he worshipped idols. In the hands of the rabbis, then, Solomon came to reflect both the best and the worst possibilities in the complex human personality. The rabbis took the biblical outline of a legendary king, and through the cumulative master-strokes of the midrash, produced the finished portrait of a man.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alpha-Beita deVen Sira. Warsaw, Traklin, 1927.
- M. Bluman, ed. Midrash Aseret Ha-dibrot. Warsaw, Baumreiter, 1886.
- William Braude, transl. Midrash Tehillim. New Haven, Yale, 1959.
- William Braude and I. J. Kapstein, transls. Pesikta deRav Kahana. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1975.
- William Braude, transl. Pesikta Rabbati. New Haven, Yale, 1968.
- Solomon Buber, ed. Aggadat Esther. Vilna, Romm, 1925.
- _____. Midrash Aggadat Bereshit. Vilna, Romm, 1925.
- _____. Midrash Mishle. Vilna, Romm, 1893.
- _____. Midrash Panim Aherim, in Sifrei deAggadeta. Vilna, 1886.
- _____. Midrash Shmu'el. Vilna, Romm, 1925.
- _____. Midrash Tanhuma. Vilna, Romm, 1885.
- _____. Midrash Tehillim. New York, Om, 1947.
- _____. Midrash Zuta. Berlin, H. Itzkowski, 1894.
- _____. Pesikta Zutreta. Vilna, Romm, 1880.
- _____. Yalkut Ha-makiri. Jerusalem, Berditchov, 1963/4.
- J. D. Eisenstein, ed. Ozar Midrashim. New York, Eisenstein, 1915.
- H. G. Enelow, ed. Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer. New York, Bloch, 1933.
- Isidore Epstein, ed. The Babylonian Talmud. London, Soncino, 1948.
- E. Funkelstein, ed. Sifre deVei Rav (to Devarim). Berlin, 1935-39.
- H. Freedman and M. Simon, eds. Midrash Rabbah. London, Soncino, 1939.
- G. Friedlander, transl. Pirke deRabbi Eliezer. New York, Hermon, 1970.
- M. Friedmann, ed. Pesikta Rabbati. Vienna, Kaiser, 1880.
- _____. Seder Eliahu Rabbah veSeder Eliahu Zuta. Jerusalem, Wahrmann, 1968/9.
- _____. Sifre deVei Rav (to Bemidbar). Vienna, J. Holzwarth, 1864.

- Moses Gaster. The Exempla of the Rabbis. New York, Ktav, 1968.
- Louis Ginzberg. The Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1928.
- M. D. Gross. Otsar Ha-aggadah. Jerusalem, Mossad Harav Kook, 1954/5.
- L. Grünhut. Sefer Ha-likutim. Jerusalem, 1898-1903.
- A. M. Habermann, ed. Ben Ha-melech Veba-nazir. Tel Aviv, Mossad Harav Kook, 1950.
- I. Hasidah. Ishel Ha-tanach. Jerusalem, 1963.
- M. Higger, ed. Masechet Semahot. New York, Bloch, 1931.
- D. Hoffman, ed. Midrash Tannaim. Berlin, H. Itzkowski, 1908.
- The Holy Scriptures. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1955.
- S. Hones, ed. Rav Pe'alim. Tel Aviv, Landau, 1967.
- Chaim M. Horowitz, ed. Aggadot Aggadot. Berlin, H. Itzkowski, 1881.
- Chaim S. Horowitz and I. Rabin, eds. Mechilta deRabbi Ishmael. Jerusalem, Wahrmann, 1969/70.
- A. Hyman, ed. Torah Ha-ketuvah Veba-mesurah. Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1938.
- Marcus Jastrow. A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. New York, Pardes, 1950.
- A. Jellinek. Beit Ha-midrash. Jerusalem, Wahrmann, 1967.
- I. L. Landau, ed. Masechet Derech Eretz. Vilna, H. Dvorzhets, 1872.
- _____. Masechet Soferim. Suwalki, A. Marksohn, 1862.
- D. Mandelbaum, ed. Pesikta deRav Kahana. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1961/2.
- M. Margulies, ed. Midrash Ha-gadol (to Bereshit). Jerusalem, Mossad Harav Kook, 1947.
- _____. Vayikra Rabbah. Jerusalem, 1953-60.
- Midrash Rabbah. Jerusalem, Par, 1970 (offset of Vilna, Romm).
- Midrash Soher Tov. Jerusalem, 1959/60.
- Midrash Tadshe. Warsaw, Traklin, 1923.
- M. Mirkin, ed. Midrash Rabbah. Tel Aviv, Yavneh, 1957.

- Otiyyot deRabbi Akiba. Warsaw, Frenkel, 1884.
- B. Ratner, ed. Seder Olam Rabbah. Vilna, Romm, 1897.
- S. Schechter, ed. Agadat Shir Ha-shirim. Cambridge, D. Bell, 1896.
- _____. Avot deRabbi Nathan. Vienna, M. Knöpfmayer, 1887.
- _____. Ginzei Schechter. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1928-9.
- M. Simon and H. Sperling, transl. The Zohar. London, Soncino, 1934.
- Talmud Bavli. New York, Otzar Hasefarim, 1958.
- Talmud Yerushalmi. Krotoschin, D. B. Monasch, 1866.
- Tanna deVei Eliahu. Spring Valley, N. Y., 1959/60 (facsimile of Lublin, 1896).
- S. Taussig, ed. Neveh Shalom. Munich, E. Huber, 1872.
- J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, eds. Bereshit Rabbah. Jerusalem, Wahrman, 1965.
- I. Weiss, ed. Sifra deVei Rav. Vienna, Schlossberg, 1862.
- J. C. Wertheimer, ed. Midrash Shir Ha-shirim. Jerusalem, Ketav Yad vaSefer, 1971.
- S. Wertheimer. Batei Midrashot. Jerusalem, Mossad Harav Kook, 1950-53.
- Yalkut Shim'oni. Jerusalem, Lewin-Epstein, 1966.
- Zohar Hadash. Warsaw, I. Rother, 1870.
- M. Zuckerman, ed. Tosefta. Pasewalk, H. Meyer, 1881.
- E. Zundel, ed. Midrash Tanhuma. Jerusalem, Lewin-Epstein, 1964.

