

## Glory and Remorse: Transitions in Solomon's Prayer (1 Kgs 8)

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### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The stories in the first book of Kings present Solomon as one of the most successful kings in the Bible. He is a most wise and rich ruler, establishing justice, maintaining peace, and he also builds the first temple for YHWH in Jerusalem. Visits and homages from kings all over the world further emphasize Solomon's glory. This dominant image of King Solomon is, however, contradicted at the beginning and ending of the story. The executions that guarantee Solomon's succession to the throne (1 Kgs 2), Solomon's apostasy (1 Kgs 11), and the oppression of opponents tarnish the king's reputation.

The story of Solomon primarily unfolds as a narration about this king: the narrating voice presents Solomon and his actions, allowing the readers to follow the literary figure of the king, while hardly providing any insight into his perspective. Thus Solomon's inner world of ideas, his wishes, intentions, or emotions, are not revealed, and the readers are only allowed an external view of this figure.

Two of the rare exceptions, where the narration presents Solomon's words in some detail, are Solomon's oneiric dialogue with God in Gibeon (1 Kgs 3) and his prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Kgs 8). These texts allow the readers to perceive Solomon's thoughts, hopes, beliefs, and knowledge. Through Solomon's own words, the image of the wise and mighty king presented by the narrative voice is modified and complemented. In contrast to the well-established king that the narrative voice

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shows in 1 Kgs 2, Solomon's self-presentation in the following chapter reveals a young man who still has to learn how to be king. He is not yet the wise king but rather wisdom's apprentice. In Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple, the king's image changes again. While the narration depicts a most splendid consecration ceremony with Solomon as its main protagonist, the prayer evokes a rather different picture, showing him as a prudent, praying man, speaking of sin and asking for forgiveness for his people. The king and builder of the temple is thereby introduced as a far-sighted advocate for his people.

The inner world of this figure therefore reveals a much more differentiated image of the king than the narration of his deeds. On the one hand, the narration's positive image is enhanced, and he is presented as a knowledgeable man, well acquainted with Israel's traditions, which he intends to continue.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, however, Solomon's prayers in 1 Kgs 8 do not create a unanimous portrait but rather show diverse aspects of Solomon's self-concept. Furthermore, the long prayers in 1 Kgs 8 develop a quite different view on the role of the monarchy and the significance of the temple. The world Solomon constructs in his prayers and the world created by the narrating voice are not congruent and thus offer a counterdiscourse.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I will focus on how the prayers modify and transform the image of the king<sup>3</sup> and the temple and examine how the new images offer links to postexilic issues and challenges.

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1. This image is strengthened by several allusions to Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions from the Pentateuch. Judith H. Newman has shown that such an approach is typical for prayers at the time of the Second Temple. These prayers frequently refer to Israel's history and thereby reinterpret single events or familiar characters. See Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, EJL 14 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 1–2.

2. A counterdiscourse problematizes "something that the dominant discourse takes for granted. Although counter-discourse may be polemical, often its relationship is not directly oppositional. It is, however, always interruptive or disruptive. It disturbs the smooth flow of what everyone takes for granted and in so doing calls attention to itself and gains a measure of cultural power by doing so. Whatever its particular strategy, counterdiscourse presupposes and depends upon the existence of the dominant discourse in order to articulate itself" (Carol A. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*, STDJ 52 [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 18).

3. When dealing with Solomon's prayer, most studies focus on the transformation of the prayer and/or the text's historical origins, while the transformation of the figure of Solomon has been widely neglected. See Michael Avioz, "The Characterization

## 2. The Structure of the Text 1 Kings 8

The description of the dedication of the new temple begins and ends with narrative statements. It starts with a description of the people's assembly at the temple (8:1–2) and the transfer of the ark and the liturgical items to the temple (8:3–9), which is accompanied by sacrifices (8:5). The description ends with a short reference to the huge amount of further sacrifices offered by Solomon (8:62–64) and a summary of the seven-day festival (8:65–66). The largest part of the text, however, reports Solomon's words to the assembly and to God. The king starts by announcing to the people and to God that he has built the temple (8:12–13). He then blesses the assembly (8:14) and recounts Israel's history from the exodus until the building of the temple (8:15–21). Later on in the text, the narrating voice explicitly mentions that Solomon stands before the altar in the presence of the assembly (8:22) offering an extensive prayer. In this prayer, he first emphasizes God's steadfast love and loyalty to Israel and David and then urges God in seven petitions to listen to Israel's cry for help in possible future situations of distress (8:31–53). At the end of his address, Solomon once more blesses the assembly and reminds the people to keep God's commandments (8:54–61). God's answer to Solomon's prayer is not included in the description of the festive dedication of the temple but only reported later in 1 Kgs 9:1–9.

Solomon's prayers are clearly emphasized by this depiction of the festive events. While the narrative voice presents the sacrifices (8:5; 62–64) as a summary, Solomon's prayer explicitly lays out the history and the intended or hoped-for role of the temple.

## 3. Forming and Transforming the Image of the King

The discrepancy between Solomon's image as a powerful and determined king, whose reign is already firmly established, and the praying king, who is still trying to establish legitimacy and stability and who can only offer hope for Israel's future in his intercessory pleas, opens a discourse on different concepts of kingship and, likewise, different expectations connected

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of Solomon in Solomon's Prayer (1 Kings 8)," *BN* 126 (2005): 19. Unlike Avioz, I do not regard the critical tones of the prayer as an ironic deconstruction of Solomon but rather a deliberate reflection of the wise king that presents the figure of Solomon in a positive way. See Avioz, "Solomon," 26.

to a sovereign. In this way, Solomon's "inner worlds" reveal diverging constructions of the king. References to well-known figures of Israel's past help to shape the portrait of Solomon.

### 3.1. Solomon and David

In Solomon's praise of God following his first blessing of the assembly, as well as in the introduction to the petitions, Solomon puts the building of the temple into the context of Israel's history. The short retrospect into Israel's history with its God focuses only on David. Solomon points out that from the beginning God had chosen David but not a city for his temple (8:16). Furthermore, David is not allowed to build a temple, but he is assured that one of his sons might carry out this project in the future. With this summary, Solomon refers to 2 Sam 7 and recalls the connection between the divine election of King David and a future temple, thus emphasizing the outstanding task of building the temple. In 1 Kgs 8:20, Solomon skillfully applies this unspecific prediction, that one of David's sons will build the temple (2 Sam 7:13), to himself and takes on the role of David's chosen successor. Solomon thereby declares his reign and the building of the temple to be the fulfillment of the divine promise to David. Consequently, Solomon's legitimacy as king and his mission to build the temple are confirmed.<sup>4</sup> The reporting of these considerations as a prayer adds special significance. In Solomon's prayer, the retrospective view on history is not just presented, but the events mentioned are integrated into a praise of God and his great deeds. The slightly biased retrospect thus becomes a laudable reality, while the authenticity of the selection process and decision-making is no longer questioned.

The introduction to the most elaborate part of Solomon's prayer (1 Kgs 8:22–30) once more refers to the theme of royal succession and legitimation. Although the main theme remains the same, the focus and its expression are markedly different. Now, the continuation of God's

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4. Gary N. Knoppers points out that "a concern with dynastic legitimacy is found in a number of ancient Near Eastern royal dedicatory inscriptions and prayers. The successful completion of the temple effects a bond between king and deity, confirming the king's right to rule" (Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda: Solomon's Dedication of the Temple and the Deuteronomist's Program," *CBQ* 57 [1995]: 243). In Solomon's case, however, the erection of the temple and the right to rule each require a separate legitimization.

support for the king is the main topic: formulated as a request in prayer, Solomon does not take God's continuous support for granted but asks for it (8:25–26). The promise David received in 2 Sam 7 is again alluded to. This divine commitment is repeatedly referenced and forms an important basis for the legitimacy of Solomon's reign throughout 1 Kgs 2–10. It is mentioned in connection with the legitimacy of Solomon's succession to the throne (see 1 Kgs 2:24; 3:6, 7) and Solomon's divine mission to build the temple (see 1 Kgs 5:17, 19; 8:17, 18, 20). Furthermore, the reference to God's promise to David is also used to highlight Solomon's obligation to follow the divine commandments. When Solomon steps into this promise as the one (chosen) son, this is enhanced further, as the moderate penalty of 2 Sam 7:14–16 is tightened: at stake is not a castigation with rods but the loss of the kingship, and with it the end of the Davidic dynasty (1 Kgs 3:14; 6:12–13; see also 9:4–5). Simultaneously, David becomes the role model for Solomon, who is instructed to follow God's commandments like his father David before him (see 1 Kgs 2:2–4). Nonetheless, as Michael D. Matlock correctly points out, the references in Solomon's prayer (1 Kgs 8:23–26) shift the focus from Solomon's obligations to God's promise.<sup>5</sup> Although Solomon mentions the need of obedience and even refers to the more demanding form (8:23–26), still the divine promises are at the center of his interest.<sup>6</sup> His plea stresses the hope that God will fulfill the promise given to David (2 Sam 7:13) guaranteeing an everlasting dynasty.

Solomon's prayer is again used to modify a retrospect, and with it David's legacy. King Solomon is presented as a humble man, accepting God's reinforced conditions without complaint, but also as a self-confident king and a demanding petitioner. Applying the promises David received for his sons exclusively to himself is an important precondition for the following petitions. Solomon needs to ascertain God's benevolent

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5. Michael D. Matlock argues that Solomon downplays obedience and the conditional character of the covenant (Matlock, "Prayer Changes Things or Things Change Prayer: Innovations of Solomon's Temple Prayer in Early Jewish Literature," in *The Letters and Liturgical Traditions*, vol. 2 of "What Does the Scripture Say?" *Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, LNTS 470, SSEJC 18 [London: T&T Clark, 2012], 163).

6. This emphasis points to an exilic/postexilic reflection on God's covenant. As in Lev 26 or Deut 4, the covenant is not abandoned due the unfaithfulness of the people, but God, in his mercy, still holds on to his promises. See Walter Groß, *Zukunft für Israel: Alttestamentliche Bundeskonzepte und die aktuelle Debatte um den Neuen Bund*, SBS 176 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998), 71–84.

attitude toward himself and the Davidic dynasty before he can state his daring requests.

### 3.2. Solomon and Moses

In addition to mentions of David, references to Moses play an important role in 1 Kgs 8. The first allusion to the time of Moses already occurs in the description of a cloud filling the sanctuary and prohibiting the priests' ministry (8:10–11). With this link to Exod 40:34–35, the narrating voice confirms that God is present and has accepted Solomon's temple. The ceremony thus draws a parallel between Solomon and his building of the temple on the one hand and Moses and the tent of meeting on the other. Solomon's attitude as an intercessor for his people before God establishes another analogy between Moses and Solomon. Like Moses, Solomon is concerned for the people, knows their weaknesses, and understands the resulting consequences.

Solomon's prayer, however, does not continue this line of thought but rather emphasizes instruction and execution, as well as promise and fulfillment. Building the temple is not only the fulfillment of a divine promise to David but also of the divine command to build a central sanctuary (Deut 12:10–11).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the temple alludes to the rest promised to Israel in Deut 12:10, consequently characterizing Solomon's reign as a time of rest and safety. Once more, Solomon justifies his rule as based on God's promise by claiming that his actions agree completely with divine providence. In his second blessing, Solomon refers to Israel's rest again (1 Kgs 8:56), but now it appears as part of a praise. In this way, Solomon connects his own perspective on his reign to the future Moses envisioned and declares it as a God-given, laudable fact.

Following from Solomon's conviction that the completion of the temple is a symbol for God's care, it is only natural that once Solomon has finished the building he asks God to hear the prayers and supplications offered at the temple.<sup>8</sup> Even in utmost distress, when Israel's disloyalty leads to its scattering among the nations, the temple, as the place chosen by YHWH to make his name dwell there, should remain a place of hope that God will still remember his people, as Moses had promised (see Deut 30:2–4; also

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7. See Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 250.

8. See Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 245.

Deut 4:29–31; Lev 26:39–42; Neh 1:8–9). In the last petition, Solomon also refers to Moses but uses yet another line of argumentation. He explicitly reminds God to remember Israel, whom he brought out of Egypt, and asks him to acknowledge this special role by answering all the people's pleas (1 Kgs 8:51–53). In this way, Solomon combines God's choosing of Israel as his heritage with God's constant attention to Israel's needs, thus pointing out and specifying the divine obligation.

To sum it up, on the one hand, Solomon interprets the temple as a place of hope, where the divine promises given to Moses and David come true. On the other hand, the newly established temple should help Israel refocus on following the divine commands.<sup>9</sup> Thus Solomon asks God to incline the hearts of the assembled people toward him, “to walk in all his ways, and to hear his commandments and his statutes and his rulings, which he commanded our fathers” (1 Kgs 8:58).<sup>10</sup> By referring to Moses and David, Solomon interprets the building of the temple as an implementation of Moses's commandments and a fulfillment of David's wish. By building the temple, Solomon ties up loose ends and marks the start of a new era. Solomon thus presents his reign and his building of the temple as the crowning point of the history of Israel's relationship with God. It is the last element in a long line of divine choices, reaching from Moses, the exodus, and the people to David and, finally, Solomon himself.

### 3.3. Solomon, the Exemplary Praying King

The insight into Solomon's thoughts that this prayer offers transforms the image of the glorious king who spares no expense to build a magnificent temple. The praying Solomon knows the limitations of his efforts and his achievements and is aware of the endangered future of his people. At the height of his reign, Solomon is depicted as a humble king, who uses his position—which is granted to him by a divine promise—to secure the future of his people by acting as their advocate before God (see Exod 32). The focus lies on the welfare of the people and their relationship to God: Solomon exclusively refers to Israel as God's people, not to the glory of the king. Instead, Solomon is portrayed as the loyal, God-fearing king pleading for his people.

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9. See Knoppers, “Prayer and Propaganda,” 250.

10. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical translations are mine.

The composition of the prayer, which includes various sources and combines different theological discourses, shows Solomon as a king with comprehensive knowledge regarding Israel's traditions and the ability to uphold a sophisticated perspective.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the references to Moses and David or the images of God's presence, the petitions also refer to God's commandments (see Lev 26:22–45; Deut 4:26–31; 28; 30). In this way, Israel's history, but also its future, is linked with the king and the temple.<sup>12</sup>

Although Solomon's prayer is not offered in any actual situation of distress, in the nucleus of his prayer, the seven petitions, he anticipates events to come. He considers possible conflicts and attempts to establish a solution.<sup>13</sup>

The crisis situations mentioned cover all kinds of disaster: from a lawsuit to drought, famine, vermin, sickness, or enemies. Several times the petitions even include a combination of all possible situations. Some of the situations depicted resemble the promises and punishments announced in Lev 26 and Deut 28.<sup>14</sup> Because these texts deal explicitly with the obligation to follow divine commandments and the corresponding reward or

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11. The question of whether Solomon's prayer is preexilic or exilic has been a matter of controversy. While today most exegetes assume an exilic context, some assume that the prayer requires an intact sanctuary and date it to the late exilic period (e.g., Hermann-Josef Stipp, "Die sechste und siebte Fürbitte des Tempelweihegebets [1 Kön 8, 44–51] in der Diskussion um das Deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk," *JNSL* 24 (1998): 205; see also Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 252.) It is more likely, however, that "events such as the Temple dedication function as magnets, attracting multiple texts and causing great reflection, redaction, and re-redaction. These reflections would increase in the exile, when theologians grappled with the relationship between prayer, exile, the Temple site, the holy city and Eretz Israel" (Marc Zvi Brettler, "Interpretation and Prayer: Notes on the Composition of 1 Kings 8.15–53," in *Minhah le-Nahum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honour of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Marc Zvi Brettler and Michael Fishbane, *JSOTSup* 154 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 34).

12. Judith Newman has shown that it is typical for Second Temple-period prayers to reflect earlier scripture. They refer to history and reinterpret single events or familiar characters in a typological way (see Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 1–2). Thus Solomon's prayer fits this description.

13. In this way, Solomon's prayer can be seen as a model for all later penitential prayers. For example, 1 Kgs 8:47 is quoted in Dan 9:5 and Ps 106:6.

14. See, e.g., 1 Kgs 8:33 (Deut 28:25; Lev 26:17); 1 Kgs 8:35 (Deut 28:23–24); 1 Kgs 8:37 (Deut 28:21, 22, 27, 35, 38, 39, 42, 59–61; Lev 26:25); 1 Kgs 8:46 (Deut 28:36, 64; Lev 26:33).

punishment, references to them enhance the aspect of wrongdoing and guilt mentioned in Solomon's petitions. In 1 Kgs 8, however, these situations are not presented as punishment but as situations to come. Similar to Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, Solomon is able to see as far as the catastrophe of exile and to raise hope for this time (see Deut 4:25–31; 30:1–10).<sup>15</sup> Solomon's role in the prayer parallels that of a prophet representing the people before God.<sup>16</sup> Solomon does not, however, share the hope expressed in Deut 4 or 30—namely, that the people will make the right decision and follow God's commandments. Rather, he assumes that the people will sin (this is made explicit in the seventh petition: "There is no person who does not sin" [1 Kgs 8:46]) and that these events will occur.<sup>17</sup> The king is no exception, and thus this statement, as Linville points out, casts a shadow on the glorious king as well.<sup>18</sup> Rather, he hopes for God's forgiveness (8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50) if the people pray (חָנַן, פָּלַל) to God, repent of their sins (1 Kgs 8:47), and return to God.<sup>19</sup> As in Lev 26 and Deut 4:29–30; 30:2–3, Solomon imagines the people's repentance, which in turn will cause God to have mercy and to remember his covenant with their fathers (Lev 26:42, 44–45).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Solomon's petitions do not take this

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15. See Ehud Ben Zvi, "What Is New in Yehud? Some Considerations," in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era*, ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking, STR 5 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 38.

16. See William M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period*, JSOTSup 197 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 189–93.

17. In contrast to later penitential prayers, Solomon's prayer does not link the present generation of the prayers with the past generation of guilt. See Mark J. Boda, "Confession as Theological Expression: Ideological Origins of Penitential Prayer," in *The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1 of *Seeking the Favor of God*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney A. Werline, EJM 21 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 38. Sinfulness does not appear as a repeated aspect of Israel's history but rather as a constitutive element of human nature.

18. James R. Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings: The Past as a Project of Social Identity*, JSOTSup 272 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 136.

19. Not only does Solomon plead with God to hear his prayer (1 Kgs 8:28, 29, 59), but he also envisions the people's prayers (8:30, 33, 35, 42, 44, 48).

20. 1 Kgs 8 picks up elements from the Deuteronomic tradition, especially its concern for a return to the observance of torah, but also the Priestly tradition, with its concern over sin and the demand of penitential prayer. See Boda, "Confession," 34; see also Daniel K. Falk, "Scriptural Inspiration for Penitential Prayer in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Development of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2 of

connection for granted (see Jer 15:1) but rather ask for God's forgiveness and help.<sup>21</sup> Solomon's prayer thus combines the different traditions, picks up a well-known list of punishments, and anticipates their execution. For these cases, Solomon tries to establish a solution so that God might turn to his people once more and rescue them.

The petitions are composed according to a common pattern: the situation is outlined, mentioning the petitioners, who with one exception are Israelites, depicting the situation of crisis and anticipating the people's actions—namely, to turn away from sin, to repent,<sup>22</sup> and to offer a prayer in or toward the temple.<sup>23</sup> In this way, "Solomon's seven petitions actively promote the temple as a site of popular prayer.... Solomon's prayer becomes a unifying symbol in Israel's worship."<sup>24</sup> This description is followed by a supplication asking God to hear the prayers and to act, to forgive, or to uphold their cause (1 Kgs 8:32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 49). Thus the hoped-for divine reaction always includes God's attention and the restoration of the people. "The temple in Solomon's strategy is envisioned as God's visual reminder of his covenant and promises to David. Prayers toward Solomon's temple can become the basis for God to remit even the most inconceivable punishment, exile, if the guilty confess and repent of their sin."<sup>25</sup> Petitions 4 and 5 also mention what the effect of God's intervention will be: fear of God, knowing his name, remembering this God, and hope that this God remembers his people and their mutual history.

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*Seeking the Favor of God*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney A. Werline, EJJL 22 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 138.

21. In contrast, Deut 28 does not foresee that the threatening penalties will not be revoked.

22. The short descriptions offered by Solomon are only elaborated in v. 47, when a (hypothetical) confession is cited: "We have sinned, and we did wrong, we acted wickedly." Newman (*Praying by the Book*, 51) suggests that "the use of a standard confessional form had developed by the time this prayer was written."

23. In the fifth petition, the petitioners are foreigners. Thus it becomes clear that God is accessible to all humans, whether they are Israelites or not, whether they are at the temple or far away, and regardless of what they are praying for—God will listen from heaven. See Volker Haarmann, *JHWH-Verehrer der Völker: Die Hinwendung von Nichtisraeliten zum Gott Israels in alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen*, ATANT 91 (Zürich: TVZ, 2008), 197–98.

24. Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 246.

25. Michael D. Matlock, *Discovering the Traditions of Prose Prayers in Early Jewish Literature*, LSTS 81 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 22.

Solomon's petitions modify the royal image by foreseeing a situation when Israel must accept the fact that it is not in the land or of no political importance (see Neh 9). It envisions a transition from monarchy to a period without a king, and it suggests that such a transition is already inherent in the concept of the temple. In this way, it opens a counterdiscourse, interrupting the dominant image of stability and duration presented by the narration. The hopes for help and rescue that are tied to the temple also anticipate a possible end of the monarchy. This concept of the temple thus transcends the concept of monarchy.

Yet another shift occurs as the center of attention moves from the king to the people. Solomon asks God to acknowledge the temple and to remember his people. The future prayers Solomon envisions, however, are not an act reserved for royalty, or even for Israel, but an opportunity for anyone at any time.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, "these petitions imagine the temple to be a place where Israelites and non-Israelites alike gather to offer their prayers to God."<sup>27</sup> In this way, Solomon abandons the role and importance of the king in this respect. The only recently established dynasty—in which Solomon was so eager to secure a place for himself—is already depicted in its transience. In this way, the dominant discourse of establishing the monarchy through the building of the temple is interrupted. Nevertheless, despite the deconstruction of the royal image, the king is still presented as an authoritative figure, establishing an interpretation of the world for times to come. The idea he emphasizes is a concept of repentance and forgiveness obtained by prayer.<sup>28</sup> Thus world-defining qualities are attributed to Solomon, which, in turn, allude to Solomon's image of the exemplary wise man and king. In this way, Solomon's prayer

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26. See Daniel F. O'Kennedy, "Prayer of Solomon (1 Ki 8:22–53): Paradigm for the Understanding of Forgiveness in the Old Testament," *OTE* 13 (2000): 78.

27. Leslie J. Hoppe, "The Afterlife of a Text: The Case of Solomon's Prayer in 1 Kings 8," *LASBF* 51 (2001): 19.

28. Werline points out, that 1 Kgs 8 "is not a penitential prayer per se, but it does instruct Israel about repentance and encourages God to respond in an expected way, with forgiveness and restoration, all of this in the form of a prayer" ("Defining Penitential Prayer," in Boda, Falk, and Werline, *Origins of Penitential Prayer*, xvi). Texts like 1 Kgs 8 represent a later phase of reflection, reinterpreting "the Deuteronomic agenda to include prayer as an essential component of this repentance" (Boda, "Confession," 27). See also Rodney A. Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution*, *EJL* 13 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 28.

is more than just a prayer; rather, it is a discourse on the function of prayers focusing on the temple.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Forming and Transforming the Image of the Temple

Solomon's prayer is also a discourse on the function of the temple. He picks up and discusses different ideas from tradition and on this basis redesigns the image of the temple and its function. When Solomon starts to redefine the expectations and hopes associated with the temple, he inevitably modifies the role of the king as well. It shifts from the image of the builder and guardian of the temple, the wealthy and glorious king, to a wise petitioner who is aware of human weaknesses and faults and, for this reason, is trying to provide support for the seemingly unavoidable disasters to come by reinterpreting the function of the temple.

##### 4.1. The Temple: Between a Royal Building and a Place to Remember

The narrating voice offers the readers a detailed tour through the temple building in 1 Kgs 6–7. It presents the temple together with Solomon's palace and other buildings as part of the king's representation. Thus Solomon, the royal builder, re-creates space according to his visions. Furthermore, an adequate temple building is also part of a king's responsibility to care for the appropriate representation of the deity, and it thus expresses respect and fear of God. Vice versa, the divine order to build a temple shows divine benevolence for the king and his reign (1 Kgs 8:19). According to the will of the deity, the temple is the place where God can dwell in the midst of Israel and where a cultic encounter can take place. Hence, the temple becomes the central space, "constructed and enacted through both divine choice and human maintenance of sacred spaces."<sup>30</sup> This designation of the temple building, and thus the start of its function

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29. See Hans-Peter Mathys, *Dichter und Beter: Theologen aus spätalttestamentlicher Zeit*, OBO 132 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 51; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 37; see also O'Kennedy, "Prayer of Solomon," 74.

30. Melody D. Knowles, *Centrality Practiced: Jerusalem in the Religious Practice of Yehud and the Diaspora in the Persian Period*, ABS 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 6.

as a center, is emphasized in several ways. The previous symbols for God's representations (the ark of the covenant, the tent of meeting, and the holy vessels) are transferred to the temple, and the priests begin their service at the temple. This action is accompanied by the king's sacrifices. Parallel to the elaborate description of the temple building in all its glory, the narrative voice mentions the huge quantity of Solomon's sacrifices (1 Kgs 8:62–64). The king thus offers all he is able to give. This ceremony is further complemented by Solomon's prayer.<sup>31</sup> Corresponding to the visual inspection of the temple by the narrating voice, the prayer offers an insight into another function of the temple: as the place toward which prayers are directed and where God will listen to them. Only Solomon's prayer makes this explicit connection between the temple and the people's prayer, thus shifting the focus from the temple as a royal-divine project to its function for the people.<sup>32</sup> Although Solomon in his prayer emphasizes his initiative to build the temple and its significance, at the same time he sets aside the importance of the temple building for the royal demonstration of power and wealth. This aspect, which dominated the narrative account, fades into the background, and thereby the detailed description of the temple as a magnificent building is put into perspective. Solomon's prayer puts two concepts of the temple side by side: On the one hand, the temple is the visible expression of Solomon's legitimacy as king and David's successor and is a highlight of Israel's history with its deity. On the other hand, the temple is a place of remembrance. The prayer marks the temple as a reminder for Israel that God takes an interest in the events related to the temple, and also as a place God may remember and pay attention to. Thus the temple is a point of intersection between the divine and the human world, a place to remember God and a place God remembers.

Another reinterpretation strategy is connected to the aspect of time. While the narrative voice presents the dedication of the temple as a single event, Solomon's prayer focuses on the temple throughout different times: its building was commanded by Moses, promised to David, and executed

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31. Newman pointed out that "prayers do not supersede sacrifices, they rather complement them" (*Praying by the Book*, 52). Furthermore, the combination of royal sacrifice and royal prayer is not unique but can also be found in several ancient Near Eastern narratives of the construction of a temple. See also Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 231.

32. Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 52; Michael Avioz, "The Characterization of Solomon in Solomon's Prayer (1 Kings 8)," *BN* 126 (2005): 20.

by Solomon, and it will function for generations to come. In this place, past, present, and future come together, and thus it is compatible for times to come.<sup>33</sup> There the hope passed on through time gains a spatial body.

#### 4.2. The Temple: Between God's Dwelling Place and a Place of Divine Attention

While the narrating voice elaborates on the building of the temple, Solomon's prayer questions the whole project by his critical reflections. Once Solomon has finished building the temple, he emphasizes his legitimacy to do so, but he also problematizes the temple's function and its suitability. Continuing the narration, Solomon first picks up the aspect of darkness (1 Kgs 8:12) connected with God's appearance in the cloud (8:10–11). He points out that God wants to dwell in darkness and that he, Solomon, has built the desired temple as a divine dwelling forever (8:13). Thus God's presence does not reveal the deity, who remains concealed.<sup>34</sup> Further on, facing the assembly of Israel, Solomon repeats God's promise to David and thereby introduces another concept of God's presence; it is not God but his name (יְהוָה) that dwells in the temple (8:17–20, 29).<sup>35</sup> With this theological construction, the far-away deity can be imagined as present, and thus God's יְהוָה is the way God is present on earth, while God dwells in heaven. Subsequently, however, Solomon calls the temple's purpose into question (8:27): will it really offer an appropriate dwelling place for God? The point of comparison is the image of YHWH's dwelling in heaven, whereby, on second thought, even heaven does not offer sufficient space (cf. the polemic question in Isa 66:1–2).<sup>36</sup> Hence, already at the dedication of the

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33. The temple does not become insignificant; on the contrary, its importance is continued beyond its destruction. See Haarmann, *JHWH-Verehrer der Völker*, 199.

34. See Jürgen van Oorschot, "Die Macht der Bilder und die Ohnmacht des Wortes? Bilder und Bilderverbot im alten Israel," *ZTK* 96 (1999): 317.

35. See Michael Rohde, "Wo wohnt Gott? Alttestamentliche Konzeptionen der Gegenwart Jahwes am Beispiel des Tempelweihgebets 1 Könige 8," *BTZ* 26 (2009): 176. For a discussion of the different images of God's dwelling, see also Brettler, "Interpretation and Prayer," 19–21.

36. Images of God's dwelling have always been connected to heaven, but the explicit localization in heaven follows the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. In the exile, the image of God's throne in heaven unfolds. See Friedhelm Hartenstein, "Wolkendunkel und Himmelsfeste: Zur Genese und Kosmologie der Vorstellung des himmlischen Heiligtums JHWHs," in *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientali-*

newly built temple, Solomon challenges its function as an adequate divine dwelling place. This fundamental questioning marks the starting point for a new definition of the temple as a space of remembrance for God and people alike.

In the following petitions (8:28–30), Solomon asks God to pay attention to his prayer and to turn toward the place of the temple. What Solomon hopes for, and what he exemplifies in his pleas, is that God will concentrate his attention on the temple, especially on the prayers that are performed there or that are offered toward the temple. Solomon's petitions focus on the temple as the predominant place of prayers, and thereby the spatial concept of the temple is modified. The temple is not foremost the place where God takes up residence, but rather it is the place God gives his attention to. The temple remains the point of intersection between the divine and the human world, but it is no longer necessary to be at the temple, neither for God nor for the people.<sup>37</sup> In his prayer, Solomon thus modifies the image of the temple. At that point in time, when the glory of YHWH (כבוד־יהוה) was going to take permanent residence in the temple, the prayer emphasizes the people's and the deity's distance from it.<sup>38</sup> Thus the temple is not only a place to appear before God in person but also a place where God and people can meet without being actually present at the temple. In this way, a different concept of the temple is outlined. The focus is no longer on the temple as a place where an encounter between God and humans may take place through their mutual presence. Rather, the space of the temple as a meeting place is separated from a bodily presence, and hence the temple also becomes virtually accessible. Both concepts may coexist; the second concept, however, can also outlast the first. Even if the temple is destroyed and/or is no longer accessible, the place can still fulfill its function.

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*schen Kontexte*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego, FAT 32 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 127.

37. In the exemplary situations presented in the seven petitions, only the first, second, and fifth petitions are offered in/at the temple; all other prayers are offered only in the direction of the temple.

38. The temple marks the transition from the idea that God is only present at the tabernacle during the time of an encounter between God and humans to the idea that God takes permanent residence in the temple. See Rohde, "Wo wohnt Gott?" 179.

### 4.3. The Temple: Between the Center of the Land and Hope for the Land

In Solomon's prayer, the concept of the temple is closely linked to the idea of "the land." The temple is not only the place prayers are directed to, but also, as a hoped for consequence, the space where people's lives are transformed. The second, third, and fourth petitions ask for the possibility to dwell in the land; this includes not only God's care for it (1 Kgs 8:36) but also the opportunity for the people to return to the land God has given to their ancestors (8:34, 40).<sup>39</sup> The people's longing for the land is again picked up in the metaphor of the people as God's inheritance (גְּחֻלָּה) in the seventh petition, whereby the people's yearning for their land blends with God's relation to his people (8:53). Thus the strong and essential tie to one's inheritance puts the people on a level with the land.<sup>40</sup> The help these petitions ask for aims at a restoration of the experienced space as it is depicted in the well-known spatial concept of the "promised land." Solomon's petitions remind God of this spatial construction and ask him to restore this concept.<sup>41</sup> The space the petitions hope for thus takes its shape from a collective memory and transfers it to a yet-unknown but hoped-for future. Yet the hope of the seventh petition (8:46–53) exceeds the remembered space and extends the hopes to "Israel's surviving as a community in exile."<sup>42</sup>

The place where such memories and hopes may be expressed is the temple. Solomon's prayer presents the temple as a space in the middle of the land but on the margins of the experienced reality. The space of the temple is presented as a space of resistance able to redefine the reality of the actually experienced space.<sup>43</sup> To partake in this space, it is not

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39. Boda points out that it is typical for later penitential prayers to emphasize the close connection between the people and the land, especially the hope to dwell in the land and to regain control of the land (Boda, "Confession," 44). 1 Kgs 8 already points in this direction.

40. The prayer uses the foundational narrative of the exodus to highlight the opportunity for divine rescue at any later time. See Boda, "Confession," 38.

41. Similar to Deut 30:1–10, Solomon's petitions express the hope for a divine intervention and a restoration of the expatriates to the land.

42. J. Gordon McConville, "1 Kings VIII 46–53 and the Deuteronomic Hope," *VT* 42 (1992): 76.

43. According to the critical spatial theory of Soja, such a space is a *Thirdspace*. For Soja, "Thirdspace is an act of resistance, a way of using space that points out its constructed nature.... Thirdspace always presents possibilities for resistance, for popular activity that redefines the realities of space" (Jon L. Berquist, "Introduction: Criti-

necessary to offer a prayer at the temple, but only to adjust the praying position (8:38; 42; 44; 48). The body or parts of the body should be turned toward the temple/Jerusalem when praying in a different place, thus referring to the temple. In this way, the geographic reach of the temple and its significance is expanded. “Like pilgrimage, the practice emphasizes the singularity of Jerusalem for worship and also explicitly includes the possibility of participation by foreigners.”<sup>44</sup> Hence, Solomon’s prayer does not focus only on Israel, but foreigners are also mentioned as beneficiaries of God’s attention to the temple. Thus the divine focus on this place Solomon asks for will change social settings and redefine boundaries.

### 5. Solomon’s Prayer:

#### A Crossroad between Monarchic and (Post)exilic Israel?

At the grand finale of the temple building, the royal prayer also looks into the future and anticipates further developments. The image of the king, the function of the temple, and the idea of prayer are therein modified. What Solomon prays for in 1 Kgs 8 remains relevant for times to come. After the exile, the community of Yehud draws its identity from the foundational past, and it looks to an ideal future.<sup>45</sup> In this way, Solomon’s prayer initiates a discourse of different perspectives and thus opens the possibility for a relecture of preexilic and exilic discourses in postexilic times.

The most obvious changes introduced in Solomon’s prayer affect the concept and the function of the temple. While classically the temple was “the locus of legitimate sacrifice and of divine revelation,” 1 Kgs 8:23–53 presents the temple mainly as “a place of prayer and supplication.”<sup>46</sup> This

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cal Spatiality and the Uses of Theory,” in *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Jon L. Berquist, LHBOTS 481 [London: T&T Clark, 2007], 5).

44. Knowles, *Centrality Practiced*, 92.

45. Ben Zvi points out that it is typical for postexilic discourses to marginalize the present and glorify the now-classical past and ideal future (“What Is New in Yehud?,” 47).

46. Jon D. Levenson points out that such a reinterpretation of the temple as a place of prayer is well known from other sixth-century literature, especially Isa 56–66; see, e.g., Isa 56:6–8 (Levenson, “From Temple to Synagogue: 1 Kings 8,” in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith; To Frank Moore Cross on the Occasion of his 60. Birthday, July 13, 1981*, ed. Baruch Halpern et al. [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981], 158–59).

different function is also reflected in the idea of the divine presence at the temple, which does not stress God's dwelling in the temple but rather emphasizes God's persistent attention that is focused on the temple. Within the logic of this concept, the temple can fulfill its function even if the petitioners are not at the temple or the temple is temporarily inaccessible. It is sufficient that they direct their prayers to the temple and that God pays attention to everything that is addressed toward the temple. Thus the idea of the centrality of the temple remains, while its function and also its accessibility are expanded and varied. This holds true not only regarding a spatial aspect but also concerning a social aspect as well, as Solomon's vision includes Israelites and foreigners. In this way, Solomon's prayer foresees the change of the temple's function for the times of exile and beyond and makes the new temple transparent to various situations to come. The literary presentation of the building of the temple as a narration and the reflection on its function in Solomon's speech make it possible to juxtapose different concepts of the temple as a discourse. In the course of this, none of the concepts are rejected; rather, they are interlocked and developed further.

Solomon's prayer is an elaborate reflection on the relationship of God and people, in the past but also in the future. It also thereby widens the concept of prayer by presenting it as a way of communication with God in various situations. Solomon drafts a theory of prayer and asks God to acknowledge it as a (new) standard. Describing such prayers, Solomon even anticipates penitential prayer as an important genre of prayer for the times to come. Solomon, the wise king, thus proclaims the theological message of exilic/postexilic times—namely, that in order to rebuild the temple and the community, Israel must confess their sins and pray for forgiveness.<sup>47</sup> In this way, Solomon's prayer presents a paradigm applicable to future periods.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, it “may offer reassurance to many generations that their own prayers would be answered by God.”<sup>49</sup> It thus emphasizes that prayer is nothing less than a way to initiate change and to (re)define the experienced world.<sup>50</sup>

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47. O'Kennedy, “Prayer of Solomon,” 77; see also Arnold Gamper, “Die heilsgeschichtliche Bedeutung des Salomonischen Tempelweihgebets,” *ZKT* 85 (1963): 60.

48. See Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 54.

49. Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 52.

50. Rodney A. Werline points out that “biblical authors and editors demonstrate a special ability to use prayer to tie Israel's larger history to the peoples' lived experi-

Concerning the image of the king, 1 Kgs 8 emphasizes the image of a wise king. At the height of his power, Solomon is portrayed as a king who summarizes Israel's history and fulfils open promises but who also reinterprets traditional religious concepts so that they may be helpful for Israel's future. Complementing the image of the magnificent and wise king with the image of a prudent and foresightful praying man makes Solomon relevant for times to come. Solomon is presented as the one who makes such a transition possible, from Moses and David to his reign, but also to a time without a monarchy.<sup>51</sup> It thus becomes obvious that neither the monarchy nor the king is able to guarantee identity for the people. Rather, identity and belonging can be achieved through prayer toward the temple. The praying king may thus be seen as a role model. Solomon's words not only initiate a new understanding of prayers; he also demonstrates how such a prayer should be performed. If "the people stretch out their hands toward the temple, the prayer also establishes the power of the temple over their actions. In their petitions and in their posture, the people imitate Solomon.... In speech and in body the king and the people become united."<sup>52</sup>

To summarize, Solomon's prayer anticipates a far-reaching transition. It does not address the issue of how, when, or why a change will happen, but rather it focuses on how the people may still communicate with their God and in which way the temple will remain the center of their hopes. In this process, the figure of the king is also transformed. The monarch is presented as an intercessor for his people, who tries to secure their relationship with God and thus to protect their future. In this way, Solomon prepares the ground for intercessors and religious leaders to come. Solomon's prayer thus refers to a crossing point, where specific ideas and conceptions from different eras are juxtaposed and linked in order to emphasize the connecting aspects. The authority of King Solomon and the importance of the narrated context, the dedication of the temple, in turn highlight the significance of this transformation.<sup>53</sup> Hence, at the climax of the narration of the monarchy, it is to no less a king than Solomon, the exemplary wise sovereign, that the task of negotiating the border between

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ences and the micropolitics of everyday life" (Werline, "Prayer, Politics, and Power in the Hebrew Bible," *Int* 68 [2014]: 16).

51. See McConville, "1 Kings VIII 46–43," 79.

52. Werline, "Prayer, Politics, and Power," 13.

53. See O'Kennedy, "Prayer of Solomon," 84.

the remembrance of a magnificent past, the experience of disaster, and an uncertain future is attributed—a task that, as 1 Kgs 8 makes clear, can (only) be mastered through prayer.

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