

From zenith to zero: a historical-theological analysis of the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon

Dan Lioy¹

Abstract

*This journal article undertakes a historical-theological analysis of the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon. Fresh insight into this investigation is obtained by making modified use of the five stages of decline appearing in Jim Collins's study titled *How the Mighty Fall*. Concededly, the author's evidence-based research deals with the underlying reasons why major corporations implode. That said, when the conceptual framework put forward by Collins is used to assess the collapse of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom, it helps to shed light on what brought about the defeat and captivity of God's chosen people, as reported in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.*

This essay affirms that the nation's journey from zenith to zero approximately corresponds to the five successive stages delineated by Collins. First, the kingdom experienced arrogance as a result of its unparalleled power and wealth. Second, this hubris emboldened the nation to plunge into an undisciplined pursuit of seizing even more worldly success. Third, the kingdom's obsession to prolong its greatness clouded the moral judgment of its leaders and resulted in them denying they were taking the covenant community down a treacherous path. Fourth, as the storm clouds of disaster began to appear on the nation's horizon, the civil and religious centers of power resorted to desperate measures to save the kingdom. Fifth, due to a series of God-ordained misfortunes and reversals, the covenant community became dispirited, lost all hope, and were eventually brought down by external forces they could neither control nor defeat.

¹ Dan Lioy (dan.lioy@alumni.usc.edu) earned the BSc from the University of Southern California, the ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary, and the PhD from North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa). He is a Senior Academic at South African Theological Seminary. He is also a professional researcher, writer, and editor of biblical resource materials, including scholarly monographs, commentaries, and dictionaries.

1. Preface

Jim Collins has spent several decades studying all sorts of companies, ranging from those that are newly created to distinguished firms that have existed over a hundred years. The list includes organizations located on a spectrum from great to good as well as from weak to insolvent (Collins 2007). Even though much of his evidence-based research has focused on investigating the reasons for corporate success, in *How the Mighty Fall* (2009), he turned his attention to the question of why some companies, despite achieving preeminence in the marketplace, eventually succumb to failure. As a result of Collins's inquiry, he has set forth five stages of institutional decline to explain the preceding phenomenon.

A synopsis of the author's findings is presented in the second section and used as a framework to assess the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon. Concededly, there are limits in applying a twenty-first century, western industry-derived model to examine ancient Near Eastern history. That said, the underlying premise of this essay is that Collins's theoretical construct, when utilized in a judicious manner to examine the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles (the primary data set for this essay; cf. Soggin 1977:332-333), sheds fresh insight on the underlying reasons for the nation's defeat and captivity. The central argument of this article is that the kingdom's journey from zenith to zero approximately corresponds to the five successive stages delineated by Collins. This supposition is borne out in the historical-theological analysis appearing in the third section of the paper.

2. The five stages of institutional decline set forth by Collins

The aim of this section is to give a brief synopsis of the five stages of institutional decline set forth by Collins (cf. 2009:15-26). The first phase is 'hubris born of success' (27). In this case, marketplace dominance is regarded as 'deserved' (43) and an 'entitlement' (21). Likewise, all notions of success as being 'fortuitous, fleeting, or even hard-earned in the face of daunting odds' (43) are rejected.

Stakeholders accept the myth that the prosperity of the company will proceed unabated, regardless of what the firm tries or avoids. The leaders of the institution set aside its fundamental core values and purpose, which were the basis of its original success. They also squander the creative talent of the firm by chasing after 'extraneous threats, adventures, and opportunities'. Moreover, instead of seeking to understand the reason why the company had become an industry leader, corporate executives adopt a 'rhetoric of success'. The

unfounded assumption is that the company will remain prosperous because it is inherently 'superior' (44) to its rivals.

The second stage is the 'undisciplined pursuit of more' (45). This is a situation in which the greatness of the institution is equated with being the largest in the industry. In response to mounting 'pressure for more growth' (63), the executives of the firm compulsively go too far and do too much. This dynamic spawns a 'vicious cycle' of oversized ambitions in which the organization makes a series of 'dramatic moves'; and in doing so, it reaches the breaking point. The deteriorating circumstance drives the most talented people from the company, which impairs its ability to 'execute' on its plans and sustain 'excellence'.

Over time, the cost of doing business rises. Also, despite the organization's attempts to shore up its balance sheet by 'increasing prices', the uptick in 'revenues' neither stems the loss of cash nor reduces the amount of debt that must be shouldered to continue day-to-day operations. In a misguided attempt to micro-manage the emerging crisis, the institution piles on additional layers of 'bureaucratic rules'. This not only fosters 'political turmoil' (64), but also disrupts and impedes the smooth transition of 'leadership' at the top. Moreover, 'personal interests' are placed above those of the company. Instead of 'investing primarily in building for greatness decades into the future', self-serving administrators attempt to 'capitalize as much as possible in the short term'.

The third stage is the 'denial of risk and peril' (65). At this point in the organization's downturn, 'negative data' (81) is minimized or invalidated, and subordinates insulate those in charge from the 'grim facts' (77). Also, corporate executives draw attention to and exaggerate the 'external praise and publicity' being heaped on the firm. In this scenario, the decision-making process is no longer characterized by an objective and critical analysis of all the relevant information. Instead, there is the tendency to condone 'sloppy reasoning' and entertain baseless 'opinions'. This state of affairs is exacerbated by a 'dictatorial management' (81) style that coerces everyone into agreement and erodes 'healthy team dynamics'.

Furthermore, institutional leaders deliberately choose to ignore 'empirical' facts and 'accumulated experience' in order to ramrod through huge, uncalibrated 'bets' (68). Because the risks are asymmetrical (that is, the downsides exceed the upsides), the gamble proves to be dicey, brazen, and foolhardy. Then, as 'setbacks and failures' (81) grow, the management team sidesteps taking 'full responsibility' for their decisions and tries to fault

‘external factors or other people’. The entity becomes distracted with seemingly endless attempts to reorganize and resolve discord brought on by ‘internal politics’. The members of the leadership team further distance themselves from having to deal with the ‘brutal realities’ by clutching for ‘symbols and perks of executive-class status’ (82).

The fourth stage is the ‘grasping for salvation’ (83). By this point, the board realizes that unless corrective measures are taken, the long-term survival of the institution is imperiled. ‘Hasty, reactive behavior’ (100) replaces ‘calm, deliberate, and disciplined’ responses and ‘intelligent, well-executed actions’ (94). In a desperate attempt to rescue the company, the executive officers seize on ‘dramatic, big moves’ (100) that they wager will lead to a ‘breakthrough’. For instance, the board might approve a ‘game changing acquisition’ or audaciously embrace an ‘exciting new innovation’. When the initial attempt fails, the corporation quickly latches onto another scheme or objective, and does so without giving sufficient forethought and adequate scrutiny to the option being considered. This pattern is repeated as one failed ‘strategy’ is quickly replaced by another.

In response to the multiple ‘threats and setbacks’, the management looks for a ‘charismatic leader’ who can save the institution. Rather than ‘setting expectations low’, the executives promise too much and fail to deliver on what they pledge. Moreover, a litany of ‘buzzwords and taglines’ are used to rekindle excitement in demoralized employees. Even when there is an ‘initial burst of positive results’, this quickly evaporates. Then, as the company fails to rectify the situation, initial hopes are ‘dashed’. People inside and outside the organization can see that its ‘cash flow and financial liquidity’ (101) have been severely compromised. As the viable ‘options narrow’, unforeseen and uncontrollable factors undercut the ability of administrators to make thoughtful ‘decisions’. Eventually, ‘confusion and cynicism’ infest the organization. On the one hand, the firm’s underlying ‘purpose’ becomes hazy; on the other hand, its ‘core values’ are ‘eroded’, which leads stakeholders to view whatever the management says as being empty ‘rhetoric’.

The fifth stage is the ‘capitulation to irrelevance or death’ (103). At this juncture, the organization finds itself in an irreversible death ‘spiral’ (105). Regardless of what the management does to stop the decline, the company’s ‘resources’ waste away, the availability of ‘cash tightens’, and ‘options’ dwindle. In some cases, the leadership continues the struggle to save the institution. Admittedly, while there is the remote possibility they might succeed in reversing the dire straits of the institution, the more likely outcome is that their efforts are doomed to fail. In other cases, the power brokers

conclude that it is futile to resist what seems inevitable and decide to let the firm 'go bankrupt'. In either case, a company that once dominated its industry fades away and is forgotten.

In stepping back from the five stages of institutional decline set forth by Collins, it is sobering to consider how 'once-invincible' (2009:47) titans of industry can 'self-destruct'. While some firms 'languish for years' (23) from one phase of a downturn to the next, others sequence through each of the stages quite rapidly. The hapless fate is comparable to an ocean-going vessel in which a hole is exploded in the side of its hull 'below the waterline' (74). Despite the heroic efforts of the crew to patch the hole and save the ship, a torrent of water pours in and plunges everyone and everything on board to the bottom of the sea.

The downturn of major establishments could also be compared to a 'staged disease' (5). At first, 'institutional decline' is more difficult to recognize but much 'easier to cure'. Then, as the organizational entity advances through the phases of deterioration, the warning signs become increasingly easier to spot but are far more challenging to remedy. This is a circumstance in which an institution outwardly appears to be strong but is 'already sick on the inside'. In fact, it is 'dangerously on the cusp of a precipitous fall'.

3. The five stages of decline leading to the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon

3.1. Introduction

This essay maintains that the five stages of institutional decline put forward by Collins approximately corresponds to the tragic arc of the covenant community's implosion as a nation-state. The preceding supposition is the rationale for taking what Collins proposed and using it as a starting point for arriving at a conceptual framework to delineate the phases that led to the defeat and captivity of God's people after the glory days of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom. What follows, then, is a modified paradigm that becomes the basis for the historical-theological analysis of the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

With respect to the nation's journey from zenith to zero, it can be seen as occurring in five successive stages. First, the kingdom experienced arrogance as a result of its unparalleled power and wealth. Second, this hubris emboldened the nation to plunge into an undisciplined pursuit of seizing even more worldly success. Third, the kingdom's obsession to prolong its greatness

clouded the moral judgment of its leaders and resulted in them denying they were taking the covenant community down a treacherous path. Fourth, as the storm clouds of disaster began to appear on the nation's horizon, the civil and religious centers of power resorted to desperate measures to save the kingdom. Fifth, due to a series of God-ordained misfortunes and reversals, the covenant community became dispirited, lost all hope, and were eventually brought down by external forces they could neither control nor defeat.

3.2. Stage one

The first stage is akin to the notion of 'hubris born of success' (Collins 2009:27). This is a circumstance in which the Israelites, during the reigns of David and Solomon, reached the zenith of their power (cf. Finkelstein 1963:56; Soggin 1977:332; Wood 1979:13). At first, the covenant community was transformed from a 'tribal confederacy to a dynastic state' (Bright 2000:184). Then, as a result of God's blessing in the lives its inhabitants, the nation came to dominate the surrounding region (cf. Wood 1970:271, 273). The 'international respect and recognition' experienced by God's people remained 'unchallenged by foreign powers until the closing years of Solomon's reign' (Schultz 1970:127).

Prior to David and Solomon, the 12 tribes were a 'loosely organized alliance' (Hill 2005:442) that experienced a recurring cycle of oppression and deliverance under various 'charismatic' leaders (1375–1050 BC; cf. Judg. 1:1–1 Sam. 7; Dumbrell 1990:49).² This tumultuous period was followed by the checkered reign of Saul (1050–1010 BC; 1 Sam. 8–31). In accordance with the social and cultural norms prevalent throughout the ancient Near East, Israel's first king was a 'male sovereign ruler' (Heim 2005:610) who exercised the 'right to transmit the royal power to his descendants' (Szikszai 1962a:11). That said, as a monarch Saul proved to be a moral and spiritual failure (cf. Alter 1999:xix; Bright 2000:191-192; Brueggemann 2005b:368; Wood 1970:245-246; 1979:87). He repeatedly compromised God's commands, brought the twelve tribes to the brink of ruin, and ended his life tormented by evil spirits (cf. Heater 1991:140; Waltke 2007:637-638).

In contrast, Saul's divinely chosen successor, David, is described as a 'man after God's own heart' (1 Sam. 13:14; cf. Acts 13:22; Arnold 2005:867; Merrill 1998:209; Wood 1979:173), in which the 'heart' denotes 'will' or 'choice' (Gordon 1997a:505). Dumbrell (1990:57) explains that 'unlike Saul,

² Unless otherwise noted, the dates used in this essay are based on the timeline appearing in the *Zondervan TNIV Study Bible* (2006:1656-1658).

David is a king by divine choice alone and not by popular demand'. Similarly, Hill and Walton (2009:259) maintain that while 'people may choose kings, as they did Saul, God chooses dynasties'. Admittedly, David was imperfect in his personal life and kingly reign (1010–970 BC); nonetheless, he stood out as 'something of a savior figure' (Williamson 1997a:469) whom others lauded as a 'shepherd, musician, poet, warrior, politician, [and] administrator' (Howard 1992a:41). Perhaps David was most renowned for his singleminded devotion to the God of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 18:3; 22:2; Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:232-233; Hasel 1979:669, 671; Klein 1992:999; Payne 1979:876; von Rad 2005:165-166). Indeed, this was the basis for David's military exploits and political achievements, which included solidifying his control over Judah and Israel, conquering Jerusalem, subduing a number of long-time foes, and establishing a 'centralized administrative structure' (Hill 2005:442; cf. 2 Sam. 1–10; Arnold 2005:869; Finkelstein 1963:50-51; Hoppe 1992:561; Kaiser 2008:113; Keller 1982:191; Merrill 1991a:162-163; Satterthwaite 2005:198).

God's hand in David's victories is noted in such passages as 2 Samuel 5:10, 12, and 8:14 (cf. Howard 1993:165). Moreover, the Lord's role is brought into sharp relief by Nathan, the 'court prophet' (Gordon 1997b:1176), not long after the king's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (cf. 11:1-27; Lasine 2001:105-106). In Nathan's oracle, he recounted how the Lord had blessed David by choosing him to be Israel's king and keeping him safe from Saul (12:7). God had also given David the property, harem, and throne of Saul (v. 8). God not only established David as the ruler of Israel and Judah, but also would have given him much more. This possibility was forfeited, however, when the king gratified his sinful passions and murdered an innocent man. David sinned partly because he felt discontent with God's blessings. Indeed, despite all that the monarch possessed, he still was not satisfied (cf. Arnold 2005:869-870; Dillard and Longman 1994:142; Edersheim 1979:4:195-196; Harrison 2005:196-198; Howard 1992a:44; Howard 1992b:1029; McKeown 2005:717; Myers 1962a:778; Stansell 1994:72; Szikszai 1962b:204).

Centuries earlier, Moses not only anticipated Israel's occupation in Canaan, but also the success and hubris it would spawn (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:186-187; Gordon 1997b:1173; Heim 2005:616-617; Orlinsky 1977:54; Schultz 1970:136; Szikszai 1962a:13). As he sketched both the delights and the perils of the land, he clearly stated the key to finding God's best. The chosen people were to obey the commands the Lord had given them and worship Him with fear and trembling (Deut. 8:6; cf. Wood 1979:28, 56). After all, God was bringing them into a land of abundant water: streams, pools, and springs

flowing everywhere (v. 7). Incidentally, that entire generation had spent four decades in the wilderness of Sinai with barely enough water to survive (cf. Waltke 2007:540). To them the divine promise must have sounded like an impossible dream. No longer would they have to march from place to place in search of water.

Moses knew quite well how easy it would be for God's people and leaders to forget Him. This is especially true when things were going well. In the land of plenty and prosperity, they would eat and be satisfied. They would enjoy the fruit of their labors. They might forget that God had given them abundant food and water. Therefore, Moses told the chosen people to praise the Lord for the 'good land' (v. 10). Moreover, all of life in Israel was to be guarded by God's laws. The faithful teaching of His commands would keep His people from forgetting about Him. Additionally, as they remembered and obeyed the Lord's decrees, they would be preserved from falling into sin and idolatry (v. 11; cf. Kaiser 2008:91-92; Klein 1988:4:317-318).

Having said that, if the Israelites failed to remain faithful to God, they would fall into pride and forget the Lord (cf. McConville 2005:630). 'Otherwise' (v. 12) implies doing something different from keeping the Lord's commands. The temptation to disobedience would come with plentiful food, comfortable houses, large flocks and herds, and wealth. When everything was 'multiplied' (v. 13), the people would become arrogant and ignore the Lord, who rescued them from Egypt, the 'land of slavery' (v. 14). While there was nothing inherently wrong with the kingdom's prosperity, if it led to boasting and forgetting God, then such abundance would eventually bring about the nation's downfall (Dillard and Longman 1994:145).

The seeds of the kingdom's demise, while possibly sown later in David's reign, took full root and mushroomed during the tenure of his successor, Solomon (970–930 BC; cf. Bright 2000:211; Heater 1991:117; Sweeney 1995:610; Wood 1970:279; Wood 1979:88). Admittedly, the latter experienced an impressive start to his reign (cf. Finkelstein 1963:54-55; Hays 2003:154; Hoppe 1992:561-562) and eventually became a 'model of royal power' (Brueggemann 2005a:xi). Despite would-be suitors to the throne, David specifically chose Solomon as his heir and directed his son to obey the Lord's commands (1 Kings 2:3; cf. Alter 1999:xiii; Dillard and Longman 1994:174; Heater 1991:144-145; Payne 1979:875; Payne 1988:566; Schultz 1970:142; Scolnic 1994:19). David declared that if Solomon remained devoted to God, He would enable the new monarch to prosper in everything he did, no matter where he went. Also, God would keep His promise to David of maintaining his dynasty as long as his descendants walked with the Lord (v. 4;

cf. 2 Sam 7:11-16; Edersheim 1979:5:56-57; Harrison 2005:200; Hays 2003:159; Hill 2005:450; Myers 1962a:781; Myers 1962b:401; Provan 1997:846, 851; von Rad 2005:162).

Solomon's auspicious beginning continued when he asked God for wisdom to be a just and prudent ruler over the chosen people (1 Kgs 3:7-9). In turn, the Lord not only gave Solomon a 'wise and discerning heart' (3:12), but also greater 'wealth and honor' (v. 13) than any other living monarch (cf. Howard 1993:149-150; Merrill 1998:290; Stansell 1994:73; Torijano 2002:11; Wood 1970:289). Israel's king 'possesses wisdom in the same sense as he possesses gold, silver, and wives: in huge quantities' (Lasine 2001:134). It is hard to imagine now, but almost 3,000 years ago there was an astute and stronger monarch on David's throne in Jerusalem than the rulers in other parts of the Fertile Crescent (cf. Eccl. 1:16; Keller 1982:203-204; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:182; Orlinsky 1977:58, 62-63; Payne 1981:46; Vos 1953:321-322; Wood 1979:305, 323). Nonetheless, at the end of the Davidic-Solomonic era, the Israelites failed at 'consolidating and maintaining a sovereign entity' of this 'significant size and strength' (Malamat 1982:190). At the outset, the Lord conditioned the length of Solomon's life on his obedience to the divine 'decrees' (1 Kings 3:14), which David had consistently observed. While David lived to be 70, Solomon died at 60 (cf. 2 Sam. 5:4; 1 Kgs 11:42). Thus, even though both reigned 40 years, Solomon's life may have been shorter than his father's because Solomon slipped away from his initial commitment to God (cf. Schultz 1970:151).

Perhaps at first the king's moral drift was obscured by the unparalleled success he enjoyed, as seen by him accomplishing the following: consolidating, fortifying, and presiding over his empire; building a magnificent palace for himself; erecting an impressive temple-complex for the Lord; bringing the ark of the covenant to the Jerusalem shrine; dedicating the temple; establishing international trade relations; and conscripting the descendants of vanquished foes into forced labor (cf. 1 Kgs 4-9; Harrison 2005:201-202; Hasel 1979:669; Ishida 1992:106-107; Klein 1992:999-1000; Millard 1981:5-6). Even an eminent dignitary such as the queen of Sheba admitted that Solomon's 'wisdom and wealth' (10:7) greatly surpassed what others had said about him (cf. Dyrness 1977:191; Edersheim 1979:5:106-108; Keller 1982:229; Myers 1962b:407; Payne 1981:60-61). Indeed, he was the embodiment of 'juridical brilliance, administrative efficiency, and encyclopedic knowledge' (Knoppers 1993:85). It is not too difficult to imagine the king's court officials, among others, regarding the nation's dominance of the region as somehow being deserved. Who knows whether Solomon himself began to take his opulence and 'imperial stature' (Malamat 1982:191) for granted, and accepted the myth

that his success would continue unabated, regardless of what he did (cf. Wood 1979:329).

Most likely, it was around the midpoint of Solomon's reign when he began to set aside his God-given core values and purpose (cf. Hill and Walton 2009:262, 294; Merrill 1998:298; 311; Wood 1970:299). Perhaps this is why, after the king had dedicated the temple, the Lord 'appeared to him a second time' (9:2) and reminded him of the importance of serving God with integrity and sincerity (v. 4; cf. Knoppers 1990:426; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:195). The Lord also warned Solomon that if he and his successors transgressed the Mosaic covenant (the 'constitution of ancient Israel'; Mendenhall 1975:158) and venerated pagan deities, disaster would overtake them. Specifically, God would remove His people from Canaan, allow the temple to be demolished, and permit Jerusalem to be destroyed (vv. 6-9; Holloway 1992:4:77; Torijano 2002:14). Scripture does not record how the king felt after this encounter with the Lord. Presumably, at least at first, Solomon took to heart what God had said; but then, the pressures of being at the helm of a sprawling empire began to distract the king and weaken his moral resolve. He seems to have embraced the unfounded assumption that his kingdom would remain prosperous due to a sense of divine entitlement.

3.3. Stage two

As Solomon moved into the latter half of his reign, he became increasingly characterized by hubris; and gradually, this emboldened him to plunge the kingdom into an undisciplined pursuit of seizing even more worldly success that would eventually bring the nation to its metaphorical ground zero (cf. Scolnic 1994:26). In line with Collins's second stage of institutional decline (cf. 2009:45), Solomon equated the greatness of his empire with being the most powerful nation in the Fertile Crescent. There seems to have been an underlying compulsion that drove him to pursue more and more fame and fortune (cf. Waltke 2007:706). There also appeared to be no limits to his ambitions, especially as he accumulated a vast amount of possessions and slaves (cf. 1 Kings 10:14-29; Eccles 2:1-10). Eventually, though, despite his felicitous beginning, his marriage to many foreign women eroded Solomon's devotion to the Lord and led him down the path of unbridled idolatry (1 Kgs 11:1-8; cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:248, 250; Handy 2005:923; Hays 2003:155; McConville 2005:630).

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 records detailed instructions for the future kings of Israel (cf. Brueggemann 2005a:142-143; Dillard 1981:290; Ellul 1972:18; Hays 2003:156-157; Howard 1993:159; Merrill 1998:190; McConville

1997:535-536; von Rad 1962:335; Sweeney 1995:615-616). They were not to accumulate horses, wives, or silver and gold. Neither Kings nor Chronicles faults Solomon for his horses or money, probably because the Lord had promised him unusual wealth as a sign of divine blessing (cf. 1 Kgs 3:13; 10:23-25); nevertheless, 1 Kings moves directly from discussing Solomon's horses and money to his many wives, for which Scripture holds him accountable (cf. Edersheim 1979:5:109-110; Wood 1979:306). In ancient times, kings often married many wives as a way of allying their dynasties with the noble families of large and small domains all around (cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:230-231; Ishida 1992:109; Mendenhall 1975:160). Accordingly, Solomon married into the Moabites and Ammonites to the east, the Edomites and Egyptians to the south, and the Sidonians and Hittites to the north (11:1). All of Solomon's wives, except his Egyptian princess, belonged to Canaanite peoples whom Israelites were not to marry lest they be led into apostasy (v. 2; cf. Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:1-4).

As God's Word foretold, the latter outcome is exactly what happened to Solomon. As the king's affection for his harem increased, his passion for God diminished (cf. Sweeney 1995:612-613). This observation is confirmed by the Hebrew verb rendered 'love', which appears only four times in 1 Kings (cf. 3:3; 5:1; 11:1, 2). In 3:3, the verb is used to describe Solomon's love for the Lord; then in 11:1, the verb is used to describe Solomon's love for his foreign wives (cf. Brown, Robinson, Driver, and Briggs 1985:12; Köhler, Baumgartner, Stamm, and Richardson 2001, 1:17; Swanson 2001). Interestingly, in 10:9, there is a Hebrew noun based on the preceding verb, in which the queen of Sheba spoke about God's 'eternal love for Israel' (cf. Brown, Robinson, Driver, and Briggs 1985:13; Köhler, Baumgartner, Stamm, and Richardson 2001, 1:18; Swanson 2001). The infinitive construct of the verbal root for the noun describes Solomon's tenacious love for his harem of 700 royal wives and 300 concubines (11:2-3; cf. Handy 2005:924). In short, the king's marriages became affairs of the heart as well as affairs of state.

Tragically, for all Solomon's wisdom, he did not appreciate the risk he incurred by loving a thousand pagan women. He also failed to anticipate the cost to the nation when he accommodated the idolatrous desires of his many wives not far from the glorious temple he had built as the place where the holy name of the Lord would dwell (vv. 5-7; Brueggemann 2005b:288-289; Smith 1993:190-191, 233). Scripture implies that Solomon's capitulation to idolatry began reluctantly and gradually, especially as he permitted idolatry within his harem. Eventually, the king had shrines for pagan deities built on high places just east of Jerusalem so that his wives could worship in preferred

surroundings (vv. 7-8). Finally, Solomon actually engaged in these pagan rituals with his wives (cf. Hays 2003:162; Mendenhall 1975:164).

It is appalling to consider how far down Solomon plummeted from the moral standard previously set by his father (Knoppers 1993:145). While David was guilty of committing adultery and murder, he always clung to the Lord with great passion. In contrast, Solomon's heart lost its grip on the Lord and his passion shifted to his wives and their gods (Dillard 1981:292; McConville 2005:630; Walsh 1995:471). His life is the epitome of 'squandered potential' (Hays 2003:164). Verses 5 and 7 mention some of the deities worshiped by Solomon's wives. Ashteroth was the fertility goddess of Phoenicia. Baal was her consort, and sacred trees or poles were her symbol. Later Jezebel, another Sidonian princess, would champion her worship in the northern kingdom of Israel (cf. 16:31-33). Molech and Chemosh were Ammonite and Moabite representations of the same cruel god, whose worship occasionally involved child sacrifice (cf. Lev. 18:21; Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:258-259; Curtis 2005:139-142; Harrison 2005:162-166; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:202).

3.4. Stage three

At this point in Solomon's reign, he was moving the kingdom into the third state of its decline. Specifically, the monarch's obsession to prolong his empire's greatness clouded his moral judgment, as well as that of his officials. Furthermore, the leadership increasingly rejected the truth that they were taking the covenant community down a treacherous path. The latter mirrors what Collins (2009:65) refers to as the 'denial of risk and peril'. On the one hand, God had made abundantly clear to Solomon and his courtiers the objective ethical standards of His law. On the other hand, despite the abundance of pertinent information concerning what the Lord expected of His people, the king and his subordinates deliberately chose to ignore His Word.

While Solomon's policies 'brought wealth' to some in the kingdom, others were forced into 'slavery'. Concededly, the monarch increased the 'powers of the state', as seen in his extensive 'building projects', armed forces, 'lavish support of the cult', a 'burgeoning private establishment', and a layered 'bureaucracy'; nonetheless, Solomon's endeavors also placed such an unbearable financial 'burden' on the nation (Bright 2000:220-221) that he turned to 'vassal states' to bridge the fiscal canyon (Brueggemann 2005a:70). The deliberate choices he made were comparable to a huge, uncalibrated bet. Expressed differently, his actions were similar to a dicey, brazen, and foolhardy gamble in which the downsides far exceeded the upsides. In a

manner of speaking, he jeopardized the long-term future of the nation by engaging in self-centered, shortsighted practices (cf. DeVries 1985:xxiii; Hill and Walton 2009:295-296; Walsh 1995:486). Even before Solomon's reign ended, the fabric of his empire began to unravel and would eventually result in its collapse. The decline of the kingdom was not an accident, either. It occurred because God judged the king and his subordinates for their idolatrous and immoral ways (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:236-237; Knoppers 1993:163; Smith 1993:210-211).

According to 1 Kings 11:9, the Lord was displeased with Solomon, for he was no longer wholehearted in his devotion to the 'God of Israel'. Moreover, because the king intentionally violated the divine prohibition concerning idolatry (v. 10), the Lord declared that He would rip away a portion of the once-united kingdom from Solomon and give it to one of his 'subordinates' (v. 11). The introduction of the Hebrew verb rendered 'tear' is the first of several occurrences that indicates the finality and forcefulness of the judgment for Solomon's sin (cf. 11:12, 13, 30, 31; 14:8). What God said to the king matched word for word Samuel's statement to Saul when his disobedience lost the monarchy for his heirs (cf. 1 Sam 15:28). In particular, Samuel told Saul that the kingdom would pass to his superior; in contrast, the Lord told Solomon that the kingdom would pass to his servant (cf. Klein 1988:318-319; Knoppers 1990:427, 437).

In the later years of Solomon's reign, the once calm political waters he so carefully cultivated became exceedingly turbulent (cf. Hoppe 1992:3:562). We can imagine that against the backdrop of this deteriorating situation, court officials placed personal interests above those of their monarch; and why not, especially since he became increasingly wayward and narcissistic in his disposition. Earlier in Solomon's tenure, gifted persons would have eagerly flocked to serve under him; but as the sun began to set on his reign, talented administrators and warriors shunned the idea, particularly as one crisis after another deluged the kingdom. Admittedly, some of these hardships were caused by adversaries the Lord raised up against the nation's monarch, including 'Hadad the Edomite' (1 Kings 11:14) and 'Rezon son of Eliada' (v. 23; cf. Bright 2000:213-214; Edersheim 1979:5:112-114; Payne 1981:63; Schultz 1970:152). Perhaps Solomon's most despised nemesis was 'Jeroboam son of Nebat' (v. 26; cf. Wood 1979:98).

Jeroboam was from Ephraim, the northern tribe that tended to dominate the others (cf. Dahlberg 1962:840; Soza 2005:544-545). At first, he was an insider, a capable official for a king famed for wisdom, justice, and righteousness (v. 28). In fact, Jeroboam handled his administrative tasks so

well that during the expansion of Jerusalem, Solomon put him in charge of all the Israelite work force from ‘the house of Joseph’, that is, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. Seale 1982:997). Previously in Solomon’s reign, there had been Israelite workers conscripted for one month of work out of every three to move timber from Lebanon to Jerusalem for the temple and palace (cf. 5:13-14). Otherwise, conscripted labor had been limited to resident non-Israelites with Israelite foremen (cf. 9:20-23). The Hebrew noun rendered ‘labor force’ (11:28), which categorizes the workers from Ephraim and Manasseh, differs from the one used of forced laborers; nonetheless, the noun still denotes wearisome, backbreaking work (cf. Brown, Robinson, Driver, and Briggs 1985:687; Ishida 1992:108; Köhler, Baumgartner, Stamm, and Richardson 2001:1:741; Myers 1962b:403; Walsh 1995:492; Soggin 1982:259; Swanson 2001).

Instead of Jeroboam being energized and content in his assigned responsibilities, he initiated a rebellion against Solomon (11:27; cf. LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:197-198; Leihart 2005:26; Tadmor 1982:250). For this insurrection, the king tried to have Jeroboam killed; but the latter managed to find refuge in Egypt, where he stayed for the remainder of Solomon’s reign (v. 40; cf. Evans 1992:742). Jeroboam had much to anticipate, especially in light of what the Lord declared to him through ‘Ahijah the prophet’ (v. 29). Jeroboam learned that God would divide the kingdom when Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, came to the throne, with Jeroboam getting 10 of the tribes (vv. 34-35; cf. McKenzie 2005:452; von Rad 2005:157; Soza 2005:545). The Lord offered Jeroboam the opportunity to establish his family as a permanent dynasty over Israel on the same terms He had offered to David (vv. 37-38). In fact, the Lord offered Jeroboam a chance to rule over all his heart desired (cf. Ellul 1972:121-122; Knoppers 1990:428; Knoppers 1993:200-201; Merrill 1997:4:769; Selman 1994:32). David had that opportunity, too (cf. 2 Sam 3:21). The difference, though, between David and Jeroboam was in what their hearts desired. The ambitious, capable civil servant would prove to have a greedy heart that eventually condemned his dynasty to early extinction (cf. 1 Kings 15:25-30; Dyrness 1977:120; Heater 1991:151; Seale 1982:997).

In concert with the observations made by Collins regarding the decline of once mighty institutions, we can see how the kingdom of David and Solomon became increasingly dictatorial in its management style. The monarch’s decision to conscript laborers from among the Israelite population is one example of Solomon’s hard-nosed approach (cf. 1 Kgs 12:4; MacLean 1962:29; McKenzie 2005:454). A second case in point would be the king’s willingness to use whatever means necessary—including murder (cf. 11:40)—to quell rebellion (cf. Handy 2005:925; Myers 1962b:401; Payne 1988:566-

567; Provan 1997:846). To Solomon's credit, his tactics enabled him to retain control over the empire. Even so, there was 'widespread discontent in the north that smoldered under the ashes' and eventually 'burst into political flame' (Soggin 1977:379). In turn, this disrupted and impeded the smooth transition of power from Solomon to his successor, Rehoboam. The latter tried to resolve the discord he faced from the 10 northern tribes by clutching onto the symbols of regal status and authority. The biblical text, however, reveals that he failed in his high-stakes gamble (cf. Edersheim 1979:5:121-122; McKnight 2005:838; Merrill 1997:4:770).

After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam went to Shechem for his public coronation as king of all Israel. Shechem lay in the northern part of the territory of Ephraim (cf. MacLean 1962:29). It was a city steeped in spiritual and historical significance for every Israelite (cf. Donner 1977:384; Heater 1991:123; Ishida 1992:112; Tadmor 1982:253). The northern tribes certainly approached Rehoboam as though they could negotiate some of the terms of their allegiance to him (12:4). Jeroboam had been living in exile in Egypt as the guest of Shishak, the pharaoh, after leading an abortive rebellion against Solomon (cf. 11:26, 40; Burge 2009:32; Dahlberg 1962:840; DeVries 1985:xxii; Harrison 2005:212). When Jeroboam heard that Solomon had died and that Rehoboam would meet with the northern tribes as part of a coronation ritual, Jeroboam came home to Ephraim (12:2; cf. 11:26; Merrill 1998:300). The leaders of the northern tribes asked Jeroboam to join them and help them articulate their grievances to the new king (12:3). They had not forgotten how capably Jeroboam had represented them to Solomon (cf. 11:28; Evans 1992:743; Leihart 2005:27; McKenzie 1987:299-300).

Jeroboam's presence as a former threat to Solomon's rule must have compelled Rehoboam and his advisers to take the complaint of the leaders of the northern tribes seriously. Rehoboam probably would have liked to arrest Jeroboam on the spot and execute him. The fact that Rehoboam did not suggests that he knew Jeroboam enjoyed greater support in the north than Rehoboam did (cf. Merrill 1998:321; Wood 1970:303). So the king asked for three days to consider how to respond to the demand made of him through Jeroboam (12:5). Rehoboam had two groups of advisers to appeal to: (1) the experienced, incumbent cabinet of his father, Solomon; and (2) the younger officials who had served him as the crown prince (vv. 6, 8; cf. Edersheim 1979:5:127; Mosiman and Payne 1988:72).

First, Rehoboam consulted his father's administrators, who knew the affairs of state well. They instantly recognized the justice of the complaint by the northern tribes and urged Rehoboam to win the loyalty of his subjects by

reducing the work projects and the accompanying taxes (v. 7). The experienced leaders wanted Rehoboam to show himself as the king being a servant of Israel, in order to earn the trust as his subjects. Rehoboam foolishly rejected the counsel of his father's officials even before he had an alternative (v. 8). Instead, Rehoboam went to the advisers he had known for years, with confidence that their recommendation would align more closely with his preferences.

Instead of acknowledging the grimness of the situation, these shortsighted bureaucrats flattered Rehoboam's vanity by urging him to be harsher than his father (vv. 10-11). Three days later, the Israelite delegation, with Jeroboam as its leader, returned to keep its appointment with Rehoboam. The latter made the speech of a harsh tyrant rather than a servant-monarch (cf. Hays 2003:166). The elders who had advised the king probably felt despair as Rehoboam acted unwisely. In contrast, his younger confidants may have reveled in the status and power they now seemed to command, especially as they listened to Rehoboam repeat the speech they had composed for him (vss. 12-14). Little did they know that the long-term survival of the kingdom was imperiled (cf. Merrill 1998:321-322; Payne 1981:66).

3.5. Stage four

By this point in the tragic arc of the covenant community's implosion as a unified state, God's people were well into the fourth stage of decline. Indeed, the storm clouds of disaster that had first appeared on the nation's horizon during the final days of Solomon's reign were now fully formed. It is at this juncture that Rehoboam and his subordinates resorted to desperate measures to save the kingdom. They never seemed to suspect that the situation had become irreversible (cf. McKnight 2005:839). We can only imagine how alarmed they became when, upon hearing Rehoboam's answer, Jeroboam and the northern tribes left Solomon's successor to ponder the folly of his ridiculous posturing about his great power (cf. Donner 1977:385; Howard 1997:1128; McKenzie 2005:452; Seale 1982:997). Ironically, the once 'united monarchy ended up where it began', that is, with the 'Hebrew tribes in disarray and clamoring for new leadership' (Hill 2005:450).

As the evidenced-based research of Collins suggests, a predicament like the one facing Rehoboam never happens overnight. It is the result of years—even decades—of military, economic, and political change (cf. Merrill 1998:311). In turn, the negative impact of a such an emerging crisis is compounded by errors in policy and a mismanagement of human and material resources. The preceding observations notwithstanding, there seems to be a watershed

moment when long-simmering grievances reach a breaking point and bring about a dramatic loss of confidence. In the case of Rehoboam, that happened when he refused to listen to the people; and this provoked them to reject him as their ruler (vv. 15-16; cf. 2 Chr. 10:1-16; Burge 2009:34; Mosiman and Payne 1988:72; Payne 1988:567).

In the heat of the moment, Rehoboam exchanged 'calm, deliberate, and disciplined' responses with 'hasty, reactive behavior' (Collins 2009:100). Then, in a desperate attempt to salvage a botched situation, the king remained at Shechem and sent out Adoniram to gather the laborers for the next season of work on royal projects. Evidently, Rehoboam expected many, if not all, of the Israelites to fall into line obediently behind the decrees and officials of the central government. Instead, the rebels stoned Adoniram (1 Kgs 12:18; cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:251). He must have been a rather elderly man, having served Solomon for 40 years and David for some time before that as the director of forced labor (cf. 2 Sam. 20:24; 1 Kgs 4:6; cf. Wood 1979:293). After killing Adoniram, the rebels marched on Shechem, which forced Rehoboam to flee for his life by chariot to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:18; cf. Donner 1977:385). When word got around that Jeroboam had returned from Egypt and led a successful forced labor and tax rebellion against Rehoboam, a popular assembly gathered and asked him to become king of Israel (v. 20). It is likely that the assembly met in Shechem, for that is the site Jeroboam first made his capital (cf. v. 25).

Now only one two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remained loyal to Rehoboam and the dynasty of David (cf. Knoppers 1990:436; Schultz 1970:169; Wood 1979:333). (Jerusalem was right on the border between Judah and Benjamin, so many of the southern towns of Benjamin were more closely tied to Jerusalem than to the north.) This dramatic reversal of fortune happened because God had purposed to tear 10 tribes from the house of David in fulfillment of the prophecy by Ahijah to Jeroboam (v. 15; cf. 11:29-36). Rehoboam and his advisers on one side, and Jeroboam and the leaders of the northern tribes on the other, acted in keeping with their self-serving characters and short-sighted interests. At the same time, these leaders and events precisely fulfilled the sovereign will of God (cf. Duke 2005:178-179; Holloway 1992:4:77; Seow 1999:3:4-5).

The situation could not have looked more bleak for Rehoboam. He was now desperate to find a way to regain the status and power that had slipped through his hands. This prompted him to make the audacious decision to put down the rebellion of the northern tribes before they could organize effective resistance. Thus, as soon as he arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all of the troops of

Judah and the loyal faction of Benjamin. Rehoboam had a force of 180,000 soldiers to crush the rebels (12:21; cf. Edersheim 1979:5:131). The king's plan mirrors that of modern-day companies in the fourth stage of institutional decline. In the case of Rehoboam, his decision was going to be the dramatic, bold move that would lead to a 'breakthrough' in his state of affairs (Collins 2009:100).

The Lord, however, overruled Rehoboam's plan when He sent a message through Shemaiah, a prophet who appears only in Kings at this point (v. 22). The Chronicler recorded another of his spoken prophecies concerning a later battle with the Egyptians (cf. 2 Chr. 12:5-8), as well as mentioned a written account Shemaiah made of Rehoboam's reign (v. 15). The Lord addressed Rehoboam in Shemaiah's prophecy as 'king of Judah' (1 Kgs 12:23). God also spoke directly to the people of Judah and Benjamin, along with the remnant of northern tribes in Judah. The Lord commanded both king and people to refrain from going to war against their 'brothers, the Israelites' (v. 24). In this message, God Himself distinguished Judah as a nation from Israel as a nation. Next, the Lord told Rehoboam and all the people remaining subject to him that He was ultimately responsible for the division of David and Solomon's domain into two kingdoms (cf. Bright 2000:231). On the basis of Shemaiah's word from the Lord, the soldiers who were ready for civil war obeyed God by disbanding and going home (cf. 2 Chr. 10:18-11:4).

This dramatic turn of events after the death of Solomon was just the first in a series of God-ordained misfortunes and reversals to be experienced by the covenant community (cf. Orlinsky 1977:75; Payne 1989:316-317). To be sure, Judah survived as an independent nation for another 344 more years (from 930-586 BC). In fact, this was considerably longer than the northern kingdom of Israel, which remained intact for only 208 more years (from 930-722 BC). Whereas all the rulers of Israel were evil, Judah cycled through a series of upright and wayward monarchs (cf. Hill and Walton 2009:289-290). The more noble-minded kings were able to rekindle the interest of the people in abiding by the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant; yet despite the efforts of these rulers, they failed to bring about lasting moral reform (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:614-615; Kaiser 2008:189; von Rad 1962:343).

With each successive generation, the viable options for God's people increasingly narrowed; and as they strayed further from the decrees recorded in the Mosaic law, the Lord allowed circumstances to overtake them that neither the rulers nor their subjects could have foreseen or controlled (cf. Dillard and Longman 1994:161; Hobbs 1985:xxxvii; Patterson and Austel 1989:4:9; Seow 1999:3). God's intention was to get His chosen people to

repent of their idolatrous and immoral ways (cf. 2 Kgs 17:7-23; 21:1-15; 22:15-20; 2 Chr. 33:1-9; 34:23-28; 36:15-21; Gray 1970:41; Jacob 1958:194; von Rad 2005:160; McConville 1997:536; Williamson 1982:25, 32). To use of the language of Collins (2009:101), the Lord wanted the remnant to reclaim their underlying 'purpose' for existing as a nation and embrace once again the 'core values' embedded in His law (cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:265-266; Howard 1993:198, 202; Selman 1994:27-28; Allen 1999:302-303). Regrettably, the covenant community rebelled against God and experienced His judgment at the hand of their enemies (e.g. the Assyrians and Babylonians, among others; cf. LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:212; von Rad 2005:155-156; Thompson 1994:30-31).

3.6. Stage five

By now, God's people were far along in the fifth and final stage of their demise as an intact covenant community. We can only guess at how dispirited and hopeless the beleaguered remnant felt as one adversary after another pounded them (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:149; Payne 1989:314). At first, various godly kings of Judah struggled to save the nation (cf. DeVries 1985:xxv; Heater 1991:152-154; Provan 1997:847); but in a manner of speaking, the ship of state's hull had taken far too many catastrophic hits 'below the waterline' (Collins 2009:74). This meant that no amount of heroics would prevent the once glorious kingdom of David and Solomon from capsizing and sinking. Indeed, it was the Lord who allowed His spiritually bankrupt people to be brought down by external forces they could neither direct nor defeat (cf. Allen 1999:302; Gray 1970:40; Selman 1994:30, 36, 60; Waltke 2007:548). He saw the moral cancer that for centuries had been eating away at the soul of the covenant community. By the time God's people were defeated by their enemies and taken into captivity, their nation was already morally rotten to the core and beyond salvaging (cf. Kaiser 2008:129; Patterson and Austel 1989:9; Payne 1981:116; von Rad 1962:336; von Rad 2005:155-156; Seow 1999:6; Williamson 1982:25).

4. Postscript

As counterintuitive as it might seem, the exile of the remnant to Babylon was the beginning of their road to spiritual renewal and national rebirth (cf. Hobbs 1985:xxxiv); and paradoxically, it was there, in that foreign land inhabited by pagans, that the chosen people became reacquainted with the stipulations recorded in Mosaic law (cf. Duke 2005:171; Selman 1994:51). Ironically, it was also in Babylon that the Jews recommitted themselves to the Lord as His

covenant community. Thus, by the time the first group of exiles returned to Judah under Zerubbabel (538 BC; cf. 1 Chr. 3:17-19; Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh. 12:1; Hag 1:1, 12, 14; Matt 1:12; Luke 3:27), they were determined not to let anyone or anything prevent them from remaining wholehearted in their devotion to God (cf. Payne 1989:312-313; Thompson 1994:43-44; Waltke 2007:549; Yamauchi 2005:293).

The latter observation is played out in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Dyrness 1977:123; Jacob 1958:274; Kaiser 2008:226; Longman 2005:489-490; Merrill 1991b:193-194; Satterthwaite 1997:636; Williamson 1997b:980-981). Ezra reveals that for the Jews returning to Jerusalem, the challenge was to rebuild not only their city, but also their relationship with the Lord. Chapters 1 through 6 deal with the restoration of the temple, while chapters 7 through 10 are concerned with the reformation of the covenant community. Nehemiah records how not only the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, but also how the people were renewed in their faith in God. Chapters 1 through 7 recount how the city's walls were successfully reconstructed, despite the stiff opposition from Judah's foes. Then, in chapters 8 through 13, the spiritual restoration of the Jews is highlighted.

Ezra and Nehemiah make it clear that God did not restore His people only one time. Rather, He repeatedly, constantly, and continually led them to renew their commitment to Him. In fact, the Lord sent a number of prophets and leaders to teach, motivate, and guide the remnant to live uprightly. Despite their unfaithfulness at times, God accomplished His will. The return from exile, the rebuilding of the temple, the restoration of Jerusalem's walls, the repopulation of the city, and the repeated reformation of the Israelites were clearly the work of the Almighty. In the end, His name was glorified!

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