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Craftsmanship and Columns

I Kings 7:1-51

Intro: I would never consider myself as a qualified “handy man.” I have done some limited remodeling in my time so you could say that I am capable but I wouldn’t hire myself out to that kind of work. Now, in my limited experience of remodeling, I have discovered that there are certain things I prefer to do and others things I’d rather not get involved with but still need to be done. I enjoy hanging sheet rock but hate to float it. I enjoy laying ceramic tile but hate to grout it. Sadly, you can’t do one without doing the other. But, of all the work that is required in a remodeling project, my hands-down least favorite thing of all is interior decorating. I don’t mind painting; I just don’t want to have to pick a color. “What color should this room be?” “Which color do you prefer out of these 15 swatches of green?” I don’t have an answer to either of those questions.

Now, with that personal character flaw in mind, let me say that it’s much easier to get excited about my own interior decorating than it is to try and decipher someone else’s written description of their interior decorating, especially if their style pre-dates me by about 3K years and they fail to provide any pictures or diagrams. Yes, we are provided with plenty of dimensions but they still require conversion into our English standard measurements. They might as well be given in meters and liters. Ch7 has 51 verses of glorious detail but to prevent us from getting lost in the weeds, we are going to focus mostly on the significance of the text rather than on the details of all the material. Don’t get me wrong, the details are still important and we will focus on a few but time limits us to an overview of the text.

The first 12 verses discuss other buildings Solomon constructed in Jerusalem, some were personal residences and some were building used in the administration of his government. The rest of ch7 returns to a detailed description of some of the larger artifacts that were part of the temple décor, some were functional, some were instructive, but all of them had a purpose that went well beyond mere decoration.

1-12 – Solomon gets a lot of bad press from quite a few commentators for

v1. They like to hold it up as evidence of Solomon's skewed priorities; that he was more concerned with his comfort than with Yahweh's worship. One will say that "the temple was glorious but it seems Solomon wanted a house that was more glorious than the temple." Another will say that this shows, "the place which his own personal comfort and luxurious taste had come to occupy in the life of Solomon," as if this is a foreboding of things to come. Is this right or are they being slightly judgmental?

First, notice that the author provides this information without any hint of negative connotation. This information is clearly important, but not for the purpose of applying a black mark against Solomon early in his reign. Let's consider the facts that we know: 1) the temple took 7 yrs to complete and yet the Bible makes it very clear that Solomon did his best to make Jehovah's temple the finest structure in the world and that God was quite pleased with the results.

2) Solomon spared no expense on the precious wood and gold overlay used to outfit the interior of the temple. 3) The temple wasn't a large structure; the main building measured only 90 ft long by 30 ft wide and 45 ft high. 7 yrs seems like a generous amount of time to construct a building of that size. 4) Most importantly, in the case of the temple, there had been extensive advanced planning and collecting of materials, even before Solomon became king. Finally, let's remember that v1-12 record the building of no less than 5 different structures, all from scratch.

So, if the author isn't using this to warn us of a royal falling away in the near future, what is he trying to tell us? To properly grasp the author's intent, it comes down to a matter of emphasis. Certainly, our text describes the palace complex and does it in impressive terms. Still, if you step back and look at the bigger picture you will immediately realize that these verse are wedged in between extensive sections on the temple building (ch6) and the temple furnishings (7:13-51). Thus, we find v1-12 is perfectly placed and yet, there's still the matter of emphasis.

When you compare the author's description of these 5 government buildings to his "over-sharing" of temple details, it's easy to see that he actually pays very little attention to The House of the Forest of Lebanon or any of the others. These government buildings are dwarfed by the massive amount of temple material on either side of them. It's as if the author is saying, yes, these buildings are important but in the grand scheme of things, they don't

really matter! The description of these buildings is like an announcement of the “also ran-s.” So actually, the literary technique he employs here is not emphasis but de-emphasis!

De-emphasis is a perfectly legitimate tactic; politicians and businesses have used this approach effectively for some time now. FDR insisted that his campaign staff never mention the name of his opponent in public. He didn't want to do anything to advertise the name of the other candidate or give them any free publicity. Businesses will often do the same thing when competing for market share with another well known business. So, it seems the author is engaged in de-emphasis here. By minimizing the space given to the government buildings, he magnifies the importance of the temple. But, if that's what he is doing, why is he doing this? What is the significance of this?

Well, we must be careful not to extrapolate the principle too far but if the temple structure is being magnified and the government building minimized, might the writer be implying that worship is more important than government? Now, we should remember that the temple doesn't represent just any worship. It only stands for the way of public worship as revealed (and accepted) by God – worship that was centered on sacrifice. At the same time, we can't say that Solomon's administration was purely secular. He was the God-appointed king of God's people and as such, he stood squarely under Yahweh's sway and standards. Still, by severely undercutting the press time given to these government structures, which too much longer than the temple to build; isn't the writer implying a valid point?

Worship is more important than government! We need to here this even in our modern era of government overreach and welfare states who are constantly trying to convince us that they care about us and can care for us better than we can care for ourselves. No, as God's people, we need to understand that the only thing that really matters in this world is that God dwells among His people. The government won't tell you that, nor the news media or social media. Only God's Word will do that and we need to be reminded of this truth on a regular basis. Someday, popular opinion will turn against Christianity completely, so much so that we could very well lose our fundamental right to worship as God has prescribed. What are you going to do when that happens? Worship is more important than government!

13-22 – Yes, lots of detail but there is also a testimony in these details. Solomon imported skilled labor in the person of Hiram (green card). Apparently, he was the best at what he did. His job was to manufacture the necessary furnishings for the temple and he accomplished this by basically following the pattern of the tabernacle furnishings. But, the articles we want to focus on in this section are the 2 columns, or bronze pillars that Hiram made to stand in front of the temple.

These columns were both about 27 ft high, 18 ft in circumference, about 3 inches thick and hollow. The capitals that set atop the pillars added another 7 ft to their height, making the pillars about 34.5 ft tall and they were more than likely free-standing. These impressively massive pillars were so noteworthy that they were actually given names: one was called Jachin and the other was Boaz. Since these pillars were likely free standing and not weight bearing, their purpose was probably symbolic. Certainly, the names they're given are theologically significant: Jachin and Boaz.

Often, when watching a football game, if the QB is mic'd you'll hear him rattle off a short series of unintelligible words before the next play begins. While those words mean nothing to the viewers at home or the opponents on the other side of the ball, they mean a great deal to the other players on the QB's team. Those words represent plays that the team has spent hours and hours at practice learning to run correctly and then more hours learning to run effectively. What means nothing to us means a great deal to the 11 guys on the field: it tells them where they're expected to be and what they're expected to do. 1 word conveys a whole scheme of choreographed movements and assignments. That's what we have in these names: single words meant to conjure up large chunks of well known spiritual truth.

Jachin means "He [Yahweh] will establish" or it could be more of a pray, "May He establish." The name comes from the Hebrew verb (kun) which appears 3Xs in God's covenant with David in **II Sam 7** and 4Xs in **ch2** in reference to securing Solomon's hold on the kingdom. Thus, the name Jachin is meant to point to Yahweh's promise that David's royal dynasty would be the vehicle through which He would bring His kingdom on earth. Yahweh will establish that royal line. Boaz means either "In Him [Yahweh] is strength" or "by Him [Yahweh] he [the king] is mighty." This implies the complete dependence of the king on Yahweh and insists that He is the only viable resource in every situation.

So what is the testimony of these 2 pillars? We have “He will establish” and “in Him is strength” serving as imposing sentinels in the front of the temple, impossible to ignore. The 1st one highlights the promise of Yahweh, the 2nd the power of Yahweh. The 1st recalls what Yahweh has said, the 2nd reminds what Yahweh can do. Jachin points to the anchor of God’s enduring Word while Boaz points to Yahweh’s ongoing adequacy to bring that Word to pass. In practical terms, these pillars were an ever-present reminder to each successive king that he was ruling by God’s appointment and God’s grace and that God alone was the source of his strength, his authority and his sufficiency. The testimony of these pillars put the king in the right frame of mind to rule God’s people.

By the same token, the testimony of these pillars also put the regular Israelite-on-the-street in the right frame of mind to worship the Lord. Jachin would highlight Yahweh’s gift while Boaz reminded them of their responsibility to rely on God in every area of their lives. When the crowds would gather at the temple for the morning and evening sacrifices, the Levites would lead the people in worship at the front of the temple with these 2 pillars standing behind them. Theirs was a constant testimony, a continual reminder. Also, it was at the temple where the people experienced what the pillars were all about. At the temple, people were established in their relationship with God. At the temple, people were given strength from the Lord.

None of us passed by any giant bronze pillars on our way into church today – at least I didn’t see any. But, even though we can do without the pillars in our modern NT worship, it’s also true that we cannot do without the testimony of those pillars. Their testimony is just as important and necessary for the NT church as it was for OT Israel and passages such as [Rom 4:21](#), [Phil 1:6](#), [Jn 15:5](#) and [Phil 4:13](#) only serve to confirm this. How much more do we need to be reminded of kingdom assurances on the one hand and our own helplessness on the other? Both of these truths are necessary to put us in the right frame of mind to worship God properly and serve Him effectively

23-51 – Whew! Lots of detail! As we plod our way through it, you can’t help but wonder if the author just grabbed some intricate blueprints and turned them into a semi-understandable story. But that’s not really the case. he

doesn't approach this with the interest of an architect. He's left out certain details that would be essential for reconstruction. We don't know the thickness of the walls, the layout of the front façade or how it was even roofed. The author has omitted much but he has also described much and it appears that he has taken great pleasure in doing so. It seems that he actually delights in all the details.

You sense this particularly in his description of the bronze Sea (23-26). This container was 15 ft in diameter, 7.5 ft tall, with a circumference of 45 ft. and walls that were 3 in thick. It's estimated to have held over 11K gallons of water, all atop the backs of 12 golden bulls. The writer of Kings seems duly impressed and why wouldn't he be, it's a very impressive piece of furniture. He also expresses an enthusiasm for describing other temple equipment. Don't let the term carts mislead you, these are estimated to be over 7 ft tall with a fluid capacity of over 200 gallons. When full, they each probably weighed about a ton so it's doubtful that a single priest could move one around by himself. Not to mention all the panels, supports and decorative work.

So, again we ask the question: why all the detail? Do we really need to know how many pomegranates are on the capitals above the pillars or how many baths the 10 lavers contained? Do we need a detailed inventory list of all the bronze and gold utensils in the temple? But, these are actually the wrong questions. What we should be asking is did the author find it laboriously tedious to write all this down? Not likely, or he wouldn't have gone to all the trouble to do it. No, it seems that item by item, he sees functionality and beauty present in the service of Israel's God. Maybe he's implying that all this intricate, carefully wrought beauty is actually fitting for the God of the Bible. Maybe he's saying that nothing can be too good, too lavish or too well done for such a marvelous God. We must never make the mistake of offering second-hand effort in the worship of our God.

Needless to say, the temple in Jerusalem was some pricey real estate! It would be nearly impossible to accurately calculate the cost of the temple in modern currency. Besides the precious metals, you would also need to factor in the original price of labor and materials and then convert it to its modern equivalents. When you consider that everything in the main hall and holy of holies was covered in gold overlay, including the ceiling, walls, floors and all the furniture and utensils, you understand that this was a ridiculously

expensive building and it was constructed for the sole purpose of honoring and worshipping the covenant God of Israel – Yahweh!

Having said that, it's a little disconcerting to know that at the end of **II Kings (ch25)** all of this elaborately expensive beauty is going to be destroyed! How can that be? How can the temple of the God who establishes and the God in whom is strength be destroyed? It just doesn't compute! Well, instead of faithfully adhering to the testimony of the 2 pillars; instead of honoring the God of the temple as they had been instructed, Israel began to act as if the marvelous temple was an honor for them. Yahweh had granted that this glorious temple would be their greatest possession. Thus, they began to take the temple for granted, that it would always be there and they would always be blessed by it. Slowly but surely, they began to drift away from their relationship with the God of the temple, living according to their own dictates and desires; worshipping whatever false gods suited their current lifestyle.

In the end, the wonderful grandeur of the temple meant nothing to Yahweh. What He most desired, His first priority was the faithful reliance and heartfelt worship of His people to Him. That's what the temple represented and without it, the temple meant nothing. It became little more than an outrageously expensive shed full of misused liturgical equipment. By the time Babylonian army marched into Jerusalem and burned the temple with fire, Jehovah clearly no longer dwelt among His people in the temple. The reason for that is because they had long since given up on and turned away from what God required of them in **6:12**. Is not modern western Christianity in danger of that very same fate? How many churches across our own country does the Holy Spirit feel welcome in? How many are even conscious of God's Word, let alone focused on it instead of focused on expanding their size and online reach?

Worship is more important than government. To that point, later on we will see when Israel is divided into 2 nations; the northern kingdom will immediately turn to idolatry. Ostensibly, this was to prevent people from subjects of the northern kingdom from traveling back to the southern kingdom to worship in Jerusalem. What we will see is that, when this happened, there were thousands of God-fearing Israelites in the northern kingdom that determined in their heart that worship was more important than government and immigrated south into Judah. They were willing to

forgo their ancestral inheritance, the land they'd been given by Yahweh Himself, to continue to worship Yahweh in the way He had prescribed. They were unwilling to let anything come between them and their relationship with the God of Israel. 😊