Chapter Four
The Divine Presence and a Heavenly Voice Come to Solomon's Aid—On Sin, Repentance, and Absolution

"*Hic bonis initiis, malos exitus habuit*"
Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVII., xx[404]

"*If Samson had remained cautious and Solomon devout,*
the one would not have been deprived
of his strength nor the
other of his wisdom"
Vita Edwardi Secundi[405]

Solomon is not merely a prefiguration of Jesus, nor simply an ideal king. He is also a king judged by his own misconduct, for his sins against God; and in both Jewish and Christian tradition, his biblical biography occupies a central place in the debate on the nature of crime and punishment, repentance and forgiveness.

Nonetheless, Christian literature accorded far more attention to this aspect of Solomon's biography than did Jewish writers. The correspondence that existed here was not one in which each side responded to the claims of the other, but rather a seemingly shared interest in, or need to address, the biblical account of Solomon's life. In this chapter, I will present only a few of the many treatments of this subject by Jewish and Christian writers in an attempt to understand the roots of their intensive occupation with the idea of Solomon as a sinner—an occupation that clearly reflects Christianity's attempt to grapple with the Bible and to do so through exegetical methods. More than one biblical king, after all, was held to account for his sins.

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In the Spanish Chapel of the Dominican church Santa Maria Novella in Florence one may find a fresco by Andrea di Bonaiuto entitled "The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Allegory of Christian Learning" (*Il trionfo di san Tomaso*

404 "He made a good start, but finished badly".
405 *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second*, originally composed in the latter half of the fourteenth century (attributed to a monk of Saint Bertin). Childs (2005, pp. 214–215). According to the *Vita Ewardi*, Solomon's rule was "a rule of peace".

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Fig. 2 Triumph of St. Thomas and allegory of the arts/Christian learning (1365), Andrea di Bonaiuto da Firenze, Fresco Cappella Spagnuolo, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, © Wikimedia Commons.

d'Aquino). The eponymous theologian is seated at its center, upon a detailed throne.[406] In 1346, another Florentine, Dante Alighieri, who had studied at that very church, completed his *Divine Comedy*; in its final section, *Paradiso*, Aquinas assumes a major role and leads the poet to Solomon, who symbolizes

406 At the Church of St. Catherine in Pisa there is a painting by Francesco Traini from c.1349 also titled "The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas." There Aristotle and Plato are placed on St. Thomas's left, Averroes lies at his feet, and standing about him are Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John. On his knees he holds a Bible opened to Proverbs 8:7 ("For my mouth shall utter truth, and wickedness is an abomination to my lips"), the quotation with which he opens his *Summa contra Gentiles*. I am grateful to Dr. Sefi Hendler for drawing my attention to this painting.

the wisdom of the governing body.[407] In Canto 10:109 – 111, Solomon is the author of Song of Songs, possessed of the highest wisdom. He is "the fifth light, the most beautiful among us \ breathes from such love, the whole world down there \ Desires vehemently to have news of it".[408]

In the fourteenth century, it was not yet certain that the theology of the Dominican St. Thomas would indeed triumph over that of the Franciscans, even though in 1321 the Vatican pronounced him a saint, and two years later the Bishop of Paris withdrew his accusations of heresy. In the fresco (one of the countless paintings that glorify him), St. Thomas is depicted as a victor—a man who has unified faith and wisdom (the latter encompassing Aristotelian philosophy and the sciences). He sits upon a Gothic-style throne wearing a black robe and holding an open book, surrounded by two sets of five figures representing the Old and New Testaments: David carries a harp; Moses, the Ten Commandments; Isaiah, the Book of Prophecies; Job, the book that bears his name; and Solomon, Proverbs. Nine figures of the ten have halos over their heads, and the only missing halo is King Solomon's.[409]

In denying Solomon a halo, Andrea di Bonaiuto expressed the duality in Christianity's attitudes towards him—a duality also reflected in Dante's work. Solomon—a prefiguration, according to Christology, of Jesus—was also a king who sinned greatly, did not repent, and never was forgiven. Hence, he did not merit the status of holiness granted to the other figures in the fresco (and it is both symbolic and ironic that the fresco decorates the hall of what was originally a monastery, whose monks came daily to confess their sins, hear words of reproof, and be absolved.

This ambivalent attitude towards Solomon, prevalent both in Jewish and Christian traditions, was an outcome of internal controversies within both religions regarding the nature of sin, proper expressions of penitence (*paenitentia*), methods of penance, and the significance of sinners' absolution and redemption (*actus iustificationis*). And, as in other contexts linked to Solomon's multifaceted legendary image, this duality gave rise to apologetics on the one hand and de-

407 "*[...] Regal prudenza e' quell vedere impair*", a reference to 1 Kings 3:9: "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

408 Dante Alighieri (1981, p. 394). In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's translation: "The fifth light, that among us is the fairest, \ Breathes from such a love, that all the world \ Below is greedy to learn tiding of it". Dante Alighieri (2017, p. 36).

409 See Norman (1995, pp. 225 – 228); Norman does not address Solomon's missing halo. It is relevant incidentally to note the figures at the bottom of the fresco, which represent the liberal arts; among them is Aristotle, representing Philosophy.

nunciation on the other. Although there were other kings in Judea and in Israel who sinned, and whose wrongdoings were not forgiven, Solomon was the paradigmatic figure in the theological debate on these issues. In the Middle Ages—and long afterward—the definition of sin and the question of proper atonement formed both the subject of extensive theological discussion and a literary theme.[410] The debate had practical implications, namely the need to clarify the motive of a sin,[411] the question of whether a sinner who repented and atoned could achieve sainthood,[412] and the matter whether a ruler who sinned could atone and be forgiven.[413]

Solomon's Sins and Downfall in Jewish Tradition

It is ironic that the biblical author, in attempting to magnify and exalt Solomon as a king, attributed a thousand wives to his name, including a Pharaoh's daughter; what might be considered grandeur was no less a sin, whose gravity cast a heavy shadow on the construction of the Temple and on the composition of Solomon's three books. It was not the fanciful number of women that troubled Jewish and Christian thinkers (and certainly the latter could be excused for not excoriating the practice of gentile marriages) but rather the fact that these women preserved and imported their religious practices, among them the worship of idols. Thus, Solomon—the chosen of God, the architect of God's Temple, the prefiguration of Jesus—became, in both traditions, a sinful king.

Regardless of whether 1 Kings 11:3 ("Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart") exaggerates matters for the purpose of glorifying Solomon, or, alternatively, as a justification for his fall,[414] his heaviest sin lay not in accumulating wives but rather in building high places of worship for their religions and participating in their rites. Because he should have restrained his wives in their idolatry but did not, the Talmud says, "the Scripture regards him as though he sinned".[415]

410 See Ohly (1992).

411 Prudentius (2011).

412 On saints of the Church who sinned and atoned for their sins, see Dorn (1967, pp. 42–43).

413 Solomon's sins are rarely mentioned in debates on the question of whether it may be justified to murder a tyrant.

414 Zakowitch (2015).

415 *Shabbat* 56a. All these sources accept, without question, the fantastic number of his wives.

The Bible recounts that Solomon "loved many foreign women [...] from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the Israelites, 'You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you; for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods'".[416] Furthermore, "when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not completely follow the Lord, as his father David had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods".[417]

The Book of Chronicles downplays the gravity of the sin, mentioning only Solomon's marriage to the Pharaoh's daughter and that he did not bring her to live in Jerusalem: He brought Pharaoh's daughter from the city of David to the house that he had built for her, for he said, "My wife shall not live in the house of King David of Israel, for the places to which the ark of the Lord has come are holy".[418] On the other hand, Ezra and Nehemiah found in Solomon's example validation for their campaign to convince Jews who returned to Zion to expel their gentile wives[419]: "Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?"[420] The Septuagint presages the apologetic line that would emerge in the future—Solomon did not at least, worship idols in the high places which he built for his wives.[421] Ben Sira does not deny Solomon's sins, but chooses to omit idolatry: "You did bow your loins to women, and in your body you were brought into subjection. You did blemish your honor, and profane your seed, to bring wrath upon your children; And I was grieved for your folly".[422] Josephus, in contrast, describes the king's sins at length. Not only did Solomon violate Mosaic law, marry many foreign women, and succumb in his dotage to

416 1 Kings 11:1–2.
417 1 Kings 11:4–8.
418 2 Chronicles 8:11.
419 Ezra 10.
420 Nehemiah 13:26–27. See Frisch (1997).
421 Gooding (1965).
422 Ben Sira 47:19–20.

their seduction (albeit only to gratify them), but he also placed images of brazen oxen in the Temple.[423]

As for the sages, they were divided in their attitudes towards Solomon's sins, or more precisely, in the ways they employed his image to transmit a theological and ethical message, or to express their views about monarchy as an institution, while other Sages sought explanations and justifications for his sins, yet also strongly condemned him. Others claimed that Solomon married many foreign wives "to draw them to the teaching of Torah and to bring them under the indwelling presence of God",[424] or even converted all of them to Judaism (Solomon converted only Pharaoh's daughter before marrying her, or did not marry her at all[425]); not only that but the conversion was valid.[426] A later *midrash* enumerated Solomon's sins: "'And King Solomon loved many foreign women and the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kings 11:1). Now was the daughter of Pharaoh not included [among the women]?[427] Why, then, was she singled out for special mention? We hereby infer that she was more beloved than all, and, vis-à-vis sin, that she caused him to sin more than all".[428] In *Yalkut Shimoni's* version, Solomon transgressed the prohibition against marrying many wives and took seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. His wisdom and his understanding failed to help him to learn from the experience of Adam that one woman was enough to deceive him.[429] On 1 Kings §172, it adds that although Solomon did indeed love God, he began building the Temple only a full four years after he was crowned, and simultaneously brought Pharaoh's daughter to the City of David. Citing Jeremiah 32:31 ("This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built until this day, so that I will remove it from my sight"), it maintains that Solomon was thus responsible for the destruction of the Temple that he built.

Some sages denied the accusation of sin; others argued that although the foreign wives did try to draw the king into idolatry, they failed, and Solomon even prevented them from building high places for the worship of idols. Just be-

423 VIII, pp. 192–193, in Josephus (1963).

424 *y.Sanhedrin* 2:6, 20c, attributed to Rabbi Yose. In the views of R. Simeon ben Yohai, R. Hanania, and R. Eliezer, however, his foreign wives caused Solomon to sin.

425 According to *b.Yevamot* 76a-b.

426 In Maimonides' anachronistic interpretation, the conversion could not be valid because it was not carried out before a rabbinical court (*beit din*) and the women thus remained idolaters. *Mishnah Torah*, *Hilchot Issurei Biah* 13:14–17.

427 *Sifre* Deuteronomy 52, (ed. Finkelstein p. 119).

428 Neusner (1987, p. 171).

429 *Yalkut Shimoni* Proverbs § 962.

cause he did not strongly protest their intention to build such places of worship in Jerusalem, "Scripture regards him as though he sinned".[430] Other sages asserted that Solomon took foreign wives "to draw them to the teaching of Torah and to bring them under the indwelling presence of God",[431] or even that he converted the daughter of Pharaoh before marrying her.[432] With regard to Ecclesiastes 7:7 ("Surely oppression makes the wise foolish, and a bribe corrupts the heart"), *Midrash Tanhuma*[433] has this to say: "When Solomon was engaged in matters in which he did not have to engage, they led him astray, for it says (in 1 Kings 11:4) 'For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods'".[434]

Maimonides did not ignore the fact that the Bible denounced Solomon, but argued that it did so because he sinned in practicing idolatry, a sin that called for severe punishment.[435] According to the biblical commentator and philosopher Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167), a king such as Solomon, who was wiser than all who lived before and after him, was incapable of being seduced into idolatry. The philosopher and statesman Isaac Abrabanel (1437–1508) also held that a wise man like Solomon could never have been beguiled by the senseless notions and abominations that "foolish gentiles" believed in. Such apologetics were at variance with the biblical account and have nonetheless endured to this very day.

Still, Solomon paid a price for his sins. According to Resh Lakish, a third-century *Amora*, "At first, Solomon reigned over the higher beings, as it is written, Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king; afterwards, [having sinned] he reigned [only] over the lower, For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tifsah even to Gaza. But eventually his reign was restricted to Israel, as it is written, I Koheleth have been king over Israel etc. Later, his reign was confined to Jerusalem alone, even as it is written, The words of Koheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem. And still later he reigned only over his

430 *Shabbat* 56b.

431 *y.Sanhedrin* 2:6, 20c. According to Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, the book Deuteronomy "ascended, bowed down before the Holy One, praise to Him, and said to Him: Master of the Universe, You wrote in Your Torah that any disposition which is partially invalid is totally invalid, and now Solomon wants to uproot a י, from me! The Holy One, praise to Him, said to Him, said to it: Solomon and thousand like him will disappear but nothing from you will disappear". *y.Sanhedrin* 2:6.

432 *Yevamot* 76a.

433 The Midrash began to take shape in Palestine in the fifth century.

434 *Tanhuma Buber Vayera* 2 on Exodus 6:2.

435 *m.Keritot* 1a.

couch".[436] Of Solomon's downfall R. Ḥiyya bar Abba, another *Amora* of the third century, said: "It would have been better for him if he had cleaned sewers, so that this verse would not be written about him".[437] The downfall was also described in *Song of Songs Rabbah:*

> "Solomon went down by three stages. The first descent was that, after he had been a great king, ruling from one of the worlds to another, his dominion was reduced, and he ruled as king only of Israel [...]. The second descent was that, after he had been king over Israel, his dominion was reduced, and he was king only over Jerusalem [...]. The third descent was that, after he had been king over Jerusalem, his dominion was reduced, and he was king only over his own house [...] But even over his own bed he did not really rule, for he was afraid of spirits [...] R. Yudan said, ' He was king, a commoner, hen king, a sage, a fool, and then a sage, rich, poor, then rich [...] R. Hunia said, 'He was commoner, king, and commoner, fool, sage, and fool; poor, rich, then poor".[438]

Yet another version appears in *y.Sanhedrin* 2:6:

> "It is Written: the Holy One, praise him, said to Solomon 'What is this crown on your head? Descend from My throne! Rabbi Yose ben Hanina said, at that moment an angel came down looking like Solomon, removed him from his throne, and sat in his stead. He was going around in synagogues and houses of study, saying *I am Ecclesiastes, I used to be king over Israel in Jerusalem*'. They were telling him, the king sits in his chair of honor and you say, *I am Ecclesiastes?* They hit him with a stick and brought a dish of beans before him".[439]

The third-century sage R. Samuel ben Naḥman was adamant on the subject, attributing the following to his teacher R. Jonathan ben Eleazar:

> "Whoever maintains that Solomon sinned is merely making an error, for it is said, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father' it was [merely] not as the heart of David his father, but neither did he sin. Then how do I interpret, For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart? That is [to be explained] as R. Nathan. For R. Nathan opposed [two verses]: It is written, For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart, whereas it is [also] written, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father, [implying that] it was [merely] not as the heart of David his father, but neither did he sin? This is its meaning: his wives turned away his heart to go after other gods, but he did

436 *Sanhedrin* 20b, trans. H. Freedman, London, 1938.
437 *Tanhuma Vayera* 6, and *Tanhuma Buber Vayera* 2.
438 *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:6. Neusner (1989, pp. 51–52).
439 *y.Sanhedrin* 2:6 20c, trans. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer (2010): *Studia Judaica* 51, De Gruyter, Berlin, p. 100.

> not go. But it is written, Then would Solomon build a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab?—That means, he desired to build, but did not".[440]

Other traditions absolved Solomon of punishment, maintaining that the price of his sins was instead paid by the Jewish people: Solomon himself escaped penalty due to paternal merit: "I will not, however, tear away the entire kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen".[441] R. Isaac (a second-generation Babylonian *Amora*), said on this matter "When Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, Gabriel descended and stuck a reed in the sea, which gathered a sand-bank around it, on which was built the great City of Rome"[442]—in other words, Solomon's sins led directly to the establishment of Rome, which would in future destroy Jerusalem and the Second Temple.

Heaven comes to Solomon's Aid

When the members of the Great Assembly were called upon to name Solomon among the three kings and four laymen condemned to have no part in the next world, the figure of David, his father, was invoked to plead his case, as well as God himself—for to forgive sins of this magnitude heavenly intervention was required:

> "R. Ashi: The men of the Great Assembly enumerated them. Rab Judah said in Rab's name: They wished to include another, but an apparition of his father's likeness came and prostrated itself before them, which, however, they disregarded. A heavenly fire descended and its flames licked their seats, yet they still disregarded it. Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out to them, 'O you see those who are skillful in their work? They will serve kings; they will not serve common people' (Prov. 22.29). He who gave precedence to My house over his, and moreover, built My house in seven years, but his own in thirteen, he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men. Yet they paid no attention even to this. Whereupon the Heavenly voice cried out, 'Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I...".[443]

In other words, it was for God alone to decide who would have a portion in the next world, independent of the considerations of humans. According to another

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440 *Shabbat* 56b, trans. Neusner, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1996, pp. 242–243.
441 1 Kings 11:13.
442 *Sanhedrin* 21b, trans. J. Israelstam, Soncino Press, London, 1951, p. 188.
443 Job 34:33; *Sanhedrin* 104b.

midrash on Proverbs, the *Shekhinah* intervened with the Almighty and said to him: "Master, have you ever seen anyone so diligent in doing your work? And yet they wish to count him among those consigned to [eternal] darkness! At that moment, a heavenly voice came forth, saying to them: 'He shall attend upon kings; he shall not attend upon those consigned to [eternal] darkness'". [444]

The gravity of Solomon's sins is secondary to the fact that the Bible does not record that Solomon repented of his transgressions and begged for forgiveness, or that he was ever forgiven. No mention is made of his having divorced his foreign wives, destroyed the high places he built for their idolatrous worship, or asked for and received God's forgiveness. According to the Bible, God did not forgive Solomon, but only promised him that, for the sake of his father David, his kingdom would be divided only after his lifetime. One might have expected the Sages to address the question of whether Solomon atoned for his sins and whether he was absolved; in fact, they hardly discuss the issue of his repentance or his absolution. Those Sages who held that Solomon's sins had been absolved could only base their belief on the fact that he ended his life as a king or argue that he acknowledged his sins and repented ("because I questioned His actions, have I stumbled"[445]). They find evidence in the fact that "Close to his death the holy spirit rested on him and he composed three books—Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes".[446]

Medieval Jewish apologetics found it difficult to accept that Solomon's good deeds could compensate for his sins; hence, even if he regretted them, they were not absolved. In *Sefer Hasidim* (The Book of the Pious),[447] R. Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (d. 1217) concluded on the basis of *Song of Songs Rabbah* that even though Solomon's books brought merit to his people, for him to escape being denied a part in the next world required a heavenly defense on the basis of his being David's son; the meaning, therefore, was that even meritorious actions that benefit the many do not suffice as defense against one's sins, or as a guarantee of a place in the world to come.[448] Bruno, Bishop of Segni (c. 1047–1123),

444 *Midrash* Proverbs 22 (Visotzky 1992, p. 156).

445 *Exodus Rabbah* 6:1.

446 *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1, 8, and parallels. The Quran also says about Solomon: "And to Dawud (David) We gave Suleiman (Solomon). How excellent (a) slave! Verily, he was ever oft-returning in repentance" (Q. 38:30) without stating why he needed to repent.

447 In fact, the book represents the combined teaching of the three leaders of German *Hasidim* (Pious Ones) during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

448 Rabbi Judah ben Samuel (1998, p. 262).

voiced a similar judgment from the Christian tradition: "A righteous man who has sinned, can have no absolution".[449]

Over time, new elements were added to the array of punishments Solomon suffered for his sins. R. Isaac ben Samuel of Acre, one of the greatest kabbalists of the fourteenth century, combined mythological (Prometheus), Jewish, and Christian traditions, the latter of which he had learned of, according to his testimony, from a Christian who told him about a monk who once saw ravens in the desert pecking at a man's flesh. When he asked, "Why are you sentenced to this punishment?" the reply was: "I am Solomon, king of Israel". Then the monk asked: "But why are you made to undergo such severe suffering by divine decree and how long will you endure it?" Solomon replied: "Until the Messiah, who is of my seed, shall come and the Almighty will forgive me owing to him." The kabbalist interpreted this as meaning that Solomon's agony symbolized the *Shekhinah*, suffering because of the exile of the people of Israel and that the ravens were gentiles or the forces of defilement, fated to be overthrown by the Messiah.[450]

In his introduction to a German translation (in Hebrew transliteration) of the Book of Proverbs,[451] the *maskil* Wolf Meir offered an explanation for Solomon's sins: in his old age, Solomon "dove into the sea of metaphysics" and concluded that all is vanity and divinely predetermined; his wives were then able to take advantage of his resulting passivity and weakness and turn his mind their way. In allowing them to build high places where they worshipped their gods, he desecrated the Temple of the Lord which was treasured by the people, who after his death despised and did not mourn him.

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449 Bruno of Segni, *Sententiae* 2 PL 165 \914B. See I. A. Robinson (1983).

450 Cited in Idel (1995). A Scottish tale maintained that Solomon was condemned to be devoured daily by ten thousand ravens until the end of the world (Butler 1993, p. 400). According another version appears in a story written in Germany at the end of the thirteenth century, in which Ashmedai, chief of the demons, plays a central role. God calls on him, commanding him to replace Solomon, who has sinned by marrying foreign women, and promises Ashmedai that he will not be harmed. Ashmedai pushes Solomon off his throne, takes his seal, and assumes the form of Solomon; the man himself walks about like a drunkard, begging for bread and insisting that he is Kohelet [Ecclesiastes] who once reigned as king in Jerusalem. He is mocked by everyone he turns to. Bathsheba, his mother, recognizes the pretender to the throne by his donkey feet, and informs Baneihu, who ascertains Solomon's identity. The tale ends with the lines: "Thus did the Almighty do for Solomon, who violated but one transgression in the Torah, and for anyone violating the words of the Sages, all the more so". On the manuscripts in which the tale appears, see Kushelevsky (2011). On this story therein, see Chapter Seven.

451 Verlag des M.I. Landa, Prague, 1834.

Christianity on Solomon's Sins and Repentance[452]

"*Women, when nothing else, beguiled the heart*
Of wisest Solomon, and made him build,
And made him bow, to the gods of his wives"
John Milton, *Paradise Regained* (Book II, 169 – 171).[453]

Solomon's status in early Christianity is reflected in the writings of Emperor Julian, who mocked the "excuses" and apologetic tactics employed to explain away Solomon's sins. Despite the lofty virtues attributed to him and his great wisdom, Solomon was incapable of restraining his desires and was seduced by a woman's words. "Is their 'wisest' man Solomon at all comparable with Phocylides or Theognis or Isocrates among the Hellenes [...] 'But', they answer, 'Solomon was also proficient in the secret cult of God'. What then? Did not this Solomon serve our gods also, deluded by his wives, as they assert? What great virtue! What wealth of wisdom! He could not rise superior to pleasure, and the arguments of a woman led him astray! Then if he was deluded by a woman, do not call this man wise".[454]

Julian's derision was directed at the Christians, but this did not prevent the latter from hurling similar claims against the Jews in order to aggrandize Jesus and ridicule Solomon. Justin Martyr, for example, wrote that "I do not hesitate to quote the Book of Kings, where it is written that Solomon committed idolatry at Sidon for the sake of a woman. On the contrary; the Gentiles who know God, the Creator of the world, through the crucified Jesus, would rather endure every torture and pain, even death itself, than worship idols, or eat meat sacrificed to idols".[455] In *The Dialogue between Timothy and Aquila*, the Jew Aquila maintains that Solomon did not sacrifice to the idols but crushed them in his hands unwillingly (26.5). To this, the Christian Timothy replies: "Will I then accept this one as a son of God, who did not move toward repentance as Manasseh did? [...] He (Solomon) did not keep any of the commandments of God, and you know that! For he even built altars to each one of the idols his wives worshipped, which he had taken as foreigners [...] know, therefore, that Solomon greatly provoked the Lord God of heaven, because he disobeyed him [...] know, O Jew, that he worshipped

452 Vanning (2002) is a detailed survey of the subject. I have relied on it greatly throughout this part of the chapter. Also see Bose (1996), and M. Bloch (1925).
453 Milton (1994, p. 403).
454 *Against the Galilaeans* 224D–224E. Trans. Wright, pp. 383 – 385.
455 Justin Martyr (2003, pp. 199 – 200).

and sacrificed grasshoppers to the idols".[456] The sinful king symbolizes the punishment of the Jews for their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, and at times he is even viewed as the Antichrist.

In *The Testament of Solomon*, the king confesses that he took numerous wives from many lands and says: "the glory of God quite departed from me; and my spirit was darkened, and I became the sport of idols and demons. I became weak as well as foolish in my words.[457] Claiming that Psalm 72 does not apply to Solomon, the author writes that he does not hesitate to repeat what is written in the book of Kings that Solomon has committed idolatry for the sake of a woman in Sidon" (xxxiv), and Origen wrote in the same vein in his commentary on Song of Songs that although Solomon was most wise, he surrendered himself to "many wives" (referring to "many nations") whom he invited to his palace in order to study their diverse doctrines and varied philosophies; he could not keep himself within the rule of divine law, and went so far as to build temples for them and even sacrifice to the idol of Moab.

Christian writings also were divided among themselves concerning Solomon sins. "The changes in attitude to Solomon throughout the centuries", writes Vanning, "reflect concomitant developments in polemic, political attitudes, philosophical knowledge, Biblical exegesis, religious thought, and theology".[458] Indeed, internal conflict is evident beyond any quarrel with Judaism. Nonetheless, I will not survey the great corpus of debates on whether Solomon did in fact sin and repent, nor the corpus of allegorical interpretations of his rise and fall, in part because the size of both is greatly inflated by repetitions.

In *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian (c. 160-c. 220) argued there was no need for Solomon to be lavish in his polygamy in order to sin since Solomon had lost the blessing of God the very first time he was "delivered up to idols".[459] Jerome (Hieronymus, 345–419/20) wrote: "Was there anyone wiser than Solomon? Yet he was made foolish by the love of women, having been overcome "by the flesh". According to Augustine "At the beginning of [Solomon's] reign he burned with a passion for wisdom, which he acquired through the love of the spirit and lost because of his love of the flesh".[460] As a result, his house "was full of foreign women who worshipped false gods; and the king himself, who had been a man of wisdom, was seduced and degraded to same idolatry".[461] "In the person of

456 9.8–9.16, Varner (2004, pp. 157–159).
457 Conybeare (1898, p. 45).
458 Vanning (2002, p. 355).
459 Vanning (2002, p. 5).
460 *De doctrina Christiana* LLL, xxi.
461 *City of God* XVII: 8 (Augustine 1984, p. 735).

this man Solomon appears both astounding excellent and its equally astounding overthrow, what happened to him at different times, first the good fortune and afterward the misfortune, therefore, is nowadays evident in the Church all the same time. For I think that signifies the Church, and the evil that befell him signifies that it is beset".[462] Pope Gregory I (540 – 604) compared Solomon to Judas and to the people of Sodom because he received his wisdom at night.[463] According to Isidore of Seville (c.560 – 636), Solomon's many good deeds failed to compensate for his sins,[464] while Walter Map (1140 – 1210), an English clergyman and author, wrote in his collection of anecdotes *De nugis curialium* (Courtiers' Trifles): "Solomon, the treasury of the Lord's delight ... had the light of his soul obscured by the thick ink of darkness, lost the perfume of his renown and the glory of his house under the glamour of women, and in the end bowed his knee to Baalim, and from being the preacher of the Lord, turned to be a limb of the Devil".[465] The Benedictine reformer (and Cardinal) Peter Damian (1007– 1072) wrote in a homily on 2 Samuel 7 that Solomon was redeemed of his sins and was necessarily holy since he was a prefiguration of Jesus. Philip of Harvengt (d.1183), abbot of the Bonne Espérance abbey, wrote in his *Responsio de damnatione Salomonis* that he found no indication in the Holy Scriptures of Solomon's atonement and absolution. He was contradicted by the author of the twelfth-century *Quod pentium Salomonis*, who asserted that there could be no doubt of Solomon's sins; after all, the *libri Hebraei* [Hebrew books] themselves record that Solomon was dragged through the streets of Jerusalem, beaten with switches in the Temple, and finally made to forfeit his throne. In *The Descent of Christ into Hell*, an apocalyptic text apparently written between 138 – 168, Solomon, alongside Adam, Eve, and others, is rescued from Hell by Jesus and led to Heaven. Similarly, the text *Acta Pilati* (Acts of Pilate) contained in the Gospel of Nicodemus, and later in Old English poetry, was inspired by Ephesians 4:7 – 11, which says that before Jesus ascended to heaven "he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth".[466] The Franciscan scholastic theologian Bonaventure (1221– 1274) regarded Solomon as an "exemplum of the penitent sinner who received divine grace".[467] The question of sin, atonement, and absolution was at times a political issue. A letter from the bishop Fulbert (c.960 – 1028) of Chartres written in 1024 to Hildegar, the sub-deacon of Chartres, regarding a dispute that had arisen between Duke Wil-

462 *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, 88:2.
463 *Moralia in Job*. 22.
464 *Questiones in Vetus Testamentum* 6 – 1.
465 Map (1988, pp. 292 – 294).
466 Dorn (1967, pp. 42 – 43).
467 Minnis (2009, p. 111).

liam of Aquitaine and his bishops cites various sources to persuade the bishops to peacefully settle the dispute. Fulbert quotes Bachiarius' (c. 350-c.425) *Liber de Reparatione Lapsi:*

> "Solomon, that wondrous man (*ille mirabilis*), who deserves to share in the wisdom that sits next to God, rushed into the embraces of foreign women; and he defiled himself by committing sacrilege when he made an image of Chamos, the idol of the Moabites. But since he was led by the prophet to acknowledge the error of his way, is he banished from the mercy of heaven? Perhaps you will say: Nowhere in the canon do I read that he was repentant [...] I have no doubt, brother, as to his repentance, though this was not recorded in the public laws, and he may have been a judge all the more acceptable because he did not do penance, not in front of the people but in the secrecy of his conscience with God as his witness. That he obtained pardon we know from this: that when he was released from his body, scripture states that he was buried among the bodies of the Kings of Israel."[468]

Fulbert's proposed solution was entirely convenient for a leader accused of having sinned: his repentance need not be public since Solomon's example demonstrated that the matter of one's sins may be settled between oneself, one's conscience, and God.

A fourteenth-century Northumbrian poem, *Cursor Mundi* (The Cursor of the World), depicted a Solomon sorely repentant of his love for heathen women: "He summoned prophets and patriarchs and begged to be relieved of crown and kingly robes, announcing his purpose to flee, because of his sins, to a foreign country. To the patriarchs, kingship was divine, and they refused to listen to his plan. He then implored them to lay upon him a hard penance. Accordingly, he was scourged through the streets, the blood streaming from his back. He bore all patiently and won mercy, after which, lust all forgotten, he ruled well and contributed lasting works to posterity".[469] In the *Legenda Aurea* (Golden Legend), a collection of legends about the lives of the saints written c. 1260 and circulated in hundreds of manuscripts,[470] the Archbishop of Genoa, Jacopo de Voragine, wrote that "It is said, but I find it not in the Bible, that Solomon repented much of this sin of Idolatry and did much penance, therefore, for he let him be drawn through Jerusalem and beat himself with rods and scourges, that the blood flowed in the sight of all the people".

The idea that the biblical depiction of Solomon's downfall was borne out in observable reality is evident in Johannes of Würzburg's (1160 – 1170) *Description of the Holy Land*, wherein the author describes how he saw firsthand the place

468 *The Letters and Poems of Fulbert of Chartres* (Behrends 1976, pp. 164 – 169).
469 In Borland (1933).
470 Between 1470 and 1530 it was one of the most printed books in Europe.

where Solomon worshiped Molech.[471] Similarly, the Russian Orthodox monk Arseny Sukhanov, who spent time in Jerusalem in the 1650s, wrote of visiting a site where King Solomon's "palace of pleasure" once stood, in which he had housed his "many wives and concubines, who were brought from diverse countries and faiths" and arranged for them places of worship. Moreover, "Solomon entered the temple of the idolaters, bowed down before them and burned incense. For all this, he was not absolved, in his old age he did wickedness in the sight of the Lord, and died".[472]

Christian theologians were preoccupied for generations with the question of repentance and absolution; indeed, this was a matter of greater concern than the nature of his sins and punishment. In his *Apologia prophetae David*, St. Ambrose asserted that as a king David was not subject to human laws, but that he sinned nonetheless by violating God's commandments, which even a king must obey.[473] Several Church Fathers expressed compassion for Solomon since he was tempted by women when he was weak and in his dotage; others absolved him entirely.[474] Yet, if Solomon did atone for his sins, how did he do so? After all, the Bible does not report that he divorced his wives and returned to full observance of God's commandments.[475]

Nor does any *midrash* attribute to Solomon the typical actions associated with a quest for absolution, such as prayer, fasting, or confession, while his father David did confess: "David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant; for I have done very foolishly'".[476] Similarly, Menasseh, the king who built high places and altars in Jerusalem, was taken prisoner by the Assyrians, during which time he repented; and after God returned him from his exile, he atoned by removing the high places he had built.[477] (This penance was made explicit only in the minor apocryphal work *The Prayer of Menasseh*.) The inhabitants of Nineveh also sought God's forgiveness for their evil deeds: "Human beings and animals

471 Johannes of Würzburg (1971).

472 Raba (1986).

473 This brief summary is based on Bose (1996) and Dorn (1967).

474 See Dorn (1967, pp. 42–43).

475 According to a 13th century Armenian manuscript, Solomon commands his chamberlain to burn all his writings, and, "having repented, he wept bitterly. And God reckoned it to him as repentance". Stone (1978).

476 2 Samuel 24:10.

477 2 Chronicles 33.

shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands".[478]

The Sages doubted the sincerity of the repentance of the people of Nineveh, and only *Teshuvat Yonah haNavi*, a *midrash* written between the eighth and eleventh centuries, describes their contrition as a model of repentance. As for Solomon, who committed the most grievous sin of all—the practice of idolatry—indeed, according to some sources he repented (not even inwardly), wore sackcloth, or prayed: *Yalkut Shimoni*[479] does relate that when Solomon was going from house to house begging, a poor man invited him to eat a simple "meal of vegetables" in his home, telling him: "this is the way of the Lord, to reprove and then reconcile... and the Lord will restore you to your kingdom." Yet, even in this tale Solomon, remembering the days of his kingdom, weeps but does not repent. The seventh blessing in *Mishnah Ta'anit* 2:4 reads: "He who answered David, and his son Solomon, in Jerusalem, may He answer you, and listen to your cry on this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who has compassion on the earth!" The words are based on Solomon's prayer at the inauguration of the Temple: "Then hear in heaven your dwelling place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know" (1 Kings 8:39). Here Solomon, however, is asking forgiveness for the sins of the entire people, rather than for his own.[480]

The quote most frequently cited as evidence that Solomon was forgiven is "Close to his death the holy spirit rested on him and he composed three books—Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes". However, no Jewish source claims that Solomon followed in the ways of David, his father, who, after his sin with Bathsheba, asked of God to "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalms 51:2).[481] The Bible and the Sages do not

478 Jonah 3:8–10.

479 *Yalkut Shimoni* on Proverbs, § 953 (15).

480 The question regarding who is repentant of a sin he committed by not restraining his earthly appetites preoccupied the Sages; one of the answers is that a repentant person is one who does not succumb to his urges or to temptation a second time. *Mishnat R. Shmuel HaHasid* states that self-mortification is also required. See Kushelevsky (2011, pp. 54–161).

481 In Muslim polemical literature against the Jews, the favorable attitude towards Solomon is called into question. Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥazm (999–1064), a prolific scholar and native of Cordoba who, in his book *Refutation of Ibn al-Naghrija the Jew, May God Curse Him* addressed a book ascribed to Samuel HaNagid that disparaged the Quran, held that the original sin had already been committed at Solomon's birth: Solomon was an outcome of the adulterous relations between Judah and Tamar and David and Bathsheba. This was one man's opinion, and it ran counter to the Quranic descriptions above. The Quran clears Solomon of any sin: 'Yet Solomon did not disbelieve" (Q. 2:102 ("The Cow")). Elsewhere, it states that "he was even turning in repentance [toward Allah]" (Q. 38:30 ("Sad")). The eleventh-century *Tales of*

overlook David's human failings or his transgressions because his confession of his sin only serves to underscore his greatness and his righteousness; yet, in Solomon's case, there is no basis for such a claim since he never admits his sin or betrays an awareness of his human frailty. Sages, preachers, and commentators who came to his defense[482] all defended his past, but not his future. Maimonides, for example, wrote that "there is no king in Israel" who was not the seed of both David and Solomon, and that whoever disagrees denies the Torah and Moses. Such a position was probably a reaction to Christological descriptions of Jesus as a "son of David" and to the eradication of Solomon's memory as the second in that dynasty. Maimonides also wrote that the "King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former state", and that it would be at its finest when a "king will arise who will possess more wisdom than Solomon and meditate on the Torah, as did his ancestor David".[483]

It is David who serves as a model for the observance of the commandments and for meditation on the Torah, while Solomon is 'the wisest of all,' who spoke in the divine spirit. In *Mishnah Torah/ Sefer ha-Mada*, Maimonides discusses "the practice of repentance" and cites several quotes from Ecclesiastes ("Remember your creator in the days of your youth", 12:1) and Proverbs ("but the righteous are established forever", 10:25).[484] But Solomon did not adhere to these rules, "and only repented on the day of his death and died penitent, all his iniquities are pardoned to him, as it is said: 'before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain' (Ecclesiastes 12:2)".[485]

The Sages ascribed many virtues and good deeds to Solomon, including the idea that by virtue of his proverbs and his study of the Torah, the people were able to delve into the more obscure meanings of the Torah.[486] Nevertheless, his sin of idolatry was not forgotten in Jewish tradition, and even though the days of his reign marked the peak period of the monarchy, he was excluded from its restorative visions of redemption. David is the "eternal" king of Israel,

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the Prophets by al-Thaʿlabī contains several accounts of Solomon repenting. In one of them, Asaf b. Brakhya, Solomon's teacher, tells the king that his wife al-Jaradah, the daughter of King Saydun, who had conquered her father's kingdom, was secretly worshipping idols. Solomon shatters the idols, dons a garment of purification, and goes forth to beg for forgiveness. In another story, he covers his body with ashes, weeps, and begs forgiveness.

482 In contrast to Solomon, David admitted to his sins and thus was forgiven. See Knoppers (1995).

483 Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 9b; *Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:1, 4. Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, Jerusalem, 2012 (Sefer Yad ha-Hazaka).

484 Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, pp. 218 – 250.

485 *Hilkhot Teshuvah* Chap. 2, 1.

486 *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1, 8 (Neusner 1989).

mentioned as a father of the nation alongside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the version of the prayer "*mi she-berakh*" (He Who Blessed Our Fathers) spoken on the Sabbath, on festivals, for the ill, and for women giving birth.

The Sages, thus, do not cite Solomon as an example of a repentant sinner, even if "One hour of repentance and good deed in this world is better than all the time in the world to come".[487] In contrast, the Christian theological discussion of Solomon's sins held that his punishment symbolized that of the Jews for having rejected Jesus as the messiah. Yet, within Christianity, it is impossible to ignore Solomon's Christological role as the prefiguration of Jesus and as the author of Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. Thus, Andrea di Bonaiuto's fresco did not exclude Solomon from St. Thomas' entourage, but only deprived him of a halo, and he was regarded as a symbol and ideal model of a king.

While Jewish tradition stresses that the women who seduced Solomon were gentiles, and thus forbidden to him, in Christian tradition the sin the women represent is that of the temptations of the flesh and the limits, or even the weakness, of wisdom vis-à-vis faith. It deals extensively with Solomon's sins in order to emphasize the great distance between him and Jesus and, in so doing, establish Jesus' place as the "true" son of David.

Did the Sages, for their part, wish to distance Solomon from Jesus in the story of Joshua ben Peraḥyah, Jesus' young "teacher"[488] who denied the former' request to return to study under him, insisting that "Anyone who sins and causes the public to sin, he is not capable of repentance"?[489] Here, Jesus' sin was that he "performed magic and led other astray toward idolatry".

It seems then that the Christian theologians' preoccupation with Solomon's sins was born of a desire to create distance between him and Jesus, though he prefigured the latter. In the Christian tradition, no heavenly voice arrives to ensure his place in the world to come.[490] He was not the "true Solomon" because Solomon was not, as Augustine wrote, innocent of all sin like Jesus,[491] whose death upon the cross bought forgiveness for all of humanity's sins.

The "correspondence" between Jesus and Solomon on the subjects discussed in the previous three chapters existed primarily on the Christian side and was expressed in a few contradictory aspects: (a) Solomon was not a "Son of God" like Jesus; (b) Solomon was expelled from the genealogy of the House of David, while Jesus was the "Son of David"; (c) Jesus was "greater

487 *Mishnah Avot* 4:17.
488 See Chapter Six.
489 *Sanhedrin* 107b.
490 See Hägerland (2012).
491 "No sin could be found in Christ himself", *City of God* XVII:9 (Augustine 1984, p. 737).

than Solomon", the "true Solomon"; and (d) Solomon was a prefiguration of Jesus. Judaism responded to these claims by rejecting Jesus' "sonship", though without establishing Solomon's sonship as a counterpoint, and by rejecting Jesus' place in the House of David. Yet, Judaism did not argue that Christianity had appropriated Solomon's three books without claiming that their author was "greater than Solomon", and the correspondence did not end there.