David And Solomon Essay, Research Paper

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King David proved to be a wise and effective leader for Israel. However, it can be said that his son, Solomon, made several mistakes during his reign. Many of his problems originated from his Temple, a stucture that was conceptualized by his father to be a deterrent against the paganism, which infested the land. Yet, it seemed as if several of Solomon s policies actually encouraged paganism rather than deter it.

King David, a member of the tribe of Judah was chosen by God to lead his people. As everyone knows, he proved by his wise choices to be a very effective leader. As a great military strategist David united the tribes and extended the national boundaries so that in his time Israel enjoyed a greater fraction of the land promised to Abraham than has ever since been the case. David ruled as king for seven years and Hebron, then established his throne in Jerusalem after overcoming the ancient Jebusite community there. His reign continued there in Jerusalem for the next 32 years. Secure on his throne and dwelling in a magnificent palace of cedar and stone, David began to be concerned that he, the visible king, dwelled in a magnificent house, but the invisible King of kings still dwelt in an aging temporary tent, the Tabernacle of Moses. At first the prophet Nathan gave David approval to construct a temple, but the following night God intervened. Speaking to Nathan in a dream God laid out for David an amazing covenant whose promises continue to this present day. God committed himself to establishing the house of David forever, to a specific land and people ,Israel, and to a temple.

David, a man of war, was not, however, to build the First Temple. That task was given to his son Solomon, although David drew up the plans. The fact that other nations had temples and Israel did not is not the reason The First Temple was to be built. The Temple was to be a memorial to Israel to turn her heart away from the idols of the surrounding nations. The Temple would provide them for an incentive not to practice the same evil things as the Canaanites. However, as good as the original intentions for the Temple were, Solomon proved to be a less effective leader than his father. Some of his decisions proved to be unwise and weakened the stability of Israel for along time to come.

Much of the trouble which occurred in Solomon s reign was directly related to his Temple. First of all, his need to showcase the power and wealth of Jerusalem required the construction of lavish palaces and other structures, such as the Temple. The income from commerce and taxation was insufficient to support all of his building projects, so he decided to cede 20 cities in Galilee to Tyre in order to raise supplemental income. Other indications that his empire was weakening was the successful rebellions of Edom and Aram against Israelite rule. Furthermore, the progressively weakening state of affairs allowed Jeroboam to break away from Solomon s rule. He was able to attain leadership over Solomon s opponents- those that were frustrated with his policies of severe taxation and forced labor.

Concerning the actual Temple, one must be reminded that King David s original intentions were to create a memorial against the Canaanite deities and paganism. However, when Solomon was given responsibility of the construction, he seemed to have forgotten this. Some of the symbolism on the alter was derived from Phoenicia, and can be traced back to older Canaanite symbols from Mesopotamia. A serious spiritual weakness was starting to materialize in the Temple during this time. Its elaborate organization and its heavy indebtedness to Syro-Phoenician religious architecture and practice. The danger of syncretism became very great- so great that the following centuries were characterized by bitter intermittent conflict between religious assimilators and religious separatists (Albright 150). In other words, the representation of both pagan and Judaic beliefs complicated the effort to reach religious unity. Solomon actually allowed the construction of pagan shrines and altars within the vicinity of Jerusalem itself. His concessions probably ensured the continuance of paganism and encouraged the relapses into paganism that would occur during the next two generations.

One of the major relapses into paganism that occurred during the next two generations was due to the religious reforms of Jeroboam I. In the North, Jeroboam I tried to counter the political influence of Solomon s temple by promoting earlier Israelite religious practices which bordered on paganism. He founded two shrines of Yahweh at Bethel and Dan. At these two shrines he set up idols that were representative of Yahweh. In 1 Kings 12:25-33, Jeroboam said:

If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam. After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt. One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. (I Kings 12:25-33)

Attempts to end the pagan worship would finally be assumed by kings such as Josiah and Hezekiah, who undertook to clear away all pagan objects and practices.

After the magnificent reign of King David, which laid the foundation for a centralized cult, the reign of Solomon stimulated a regression back to pagan beliefs and practices. The temple was built for aesthetic and personal reasons, it seemed, while its religious significance was compromised. The implications of this compromise was that it triggered relapses into paganism and also a sense of religious synchretism which lasted roughly two generations. This period of religious uncertainty was finally ended by reformist kings, such as Hezekiah and Josiah, that implemented policies that would purge the land of paganism and centralize the cult.

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