

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE HIS HIGHLIGHT AND DOWNFALL

According to Scot's First Law, "No matter what goes wrong, it will probably look right." The flip side is that no matter how right it looks, something will probably go wrong.

You could say the same thing about many events in the Bible. Some developments look so holy and pure when they're laid down, but peeking out from under the edges are some dirty consequences.

Check it out for yourself. What could be more perfect than a temple for the Lord? If you could get the blueprints past the building commissioner, the project must be 100% A-OK. That's the initial impression you get from reading 1 Kings 5-89. (In some Bibles make that 3 Kings 5-8.)

Here's the story. Near the beginning of his fabled reign, King Solomon decided to build a temple for the Lord in downtown Jerusalem. So far, so good. The Lord needed to be worshiped, right? And what better place than the traditional sacrificial hill chosen by his father King David?

So Solomon set to work. He recruited stone masons, wood workers, carpenters, architects, metal workers, plus thousand of unskilled laborers. He sent north for cedar and pine, south for bronze, and east for gold. A successful fund-raising drive paid for the whole shebang.

Seven years later the building was finished. (Keep in mind; this was over 500 years before the Greeks got around to raising the Parthenon on Athens' Acropolis.) What Solomon had was one impressive structure. The Lord should have been impressed, not to mention the citizens who financed the temple.

So 1 Kings 5-8, which details the building plans and its ornamentation, includes the kind of prayers and sermons which are appropriate for the dedication of such a grand production. Everything looked nice and holy.

But look again. There were flaws in Solomon's plans and cracks in its execution. You can find hints in the same chapters of 1 Kings.

For openers, the Israelites had spent the previous 250 years as small-time herdsmen and farmers. They didn't have much background in large-scale architecture. So when Solomon set to work, he had to get his plans from the neighboring Phoenicians. Not to mention the wood,

the precious metals and most of the unionized craftsmen.

That took money. And that meant taxes. So for the first time in their history the confederation of Israelite tribe was reorganized into more efficient taxing districts. In other words, the people paid through the nose.

And they worked their buns off. Since the time of Moses, it had been assumed that no Hebrew would enslave another Hebrew. But with Solomon ruling the roosts, 30,000 Israelites were drafted into forced labor.

Furthermore, Solomon didn't stop with a temple. He added a town house for himself, an office building with an auditorium, an enclosed mall, a condominium for his wife, and however many streets and alleys it took to hold his urban renewal project together.

The royal neighborhood encircled the temple. So when all was said and done, the house of God looked almost like a palace chapel. Which says something about who gets to call the shots.

You can detect a subtle shift in control. Early in the building program, according to 1 Kings 6:11-13, the Lord was saying to Solomon, "If you remain faithful, I will live in your building."

But by the time dedication day rolled around, according to 1 Kings 8:12-13, Solomon was saying to the Lord, "Look at the gorgeous home I've constructed for you." It's almost as though Yahweh, the free Lord of the tribes of Israel, had been domesticated by a clever administrator.

There you have it. The biblical record discloses both sides of the issue. On the one hand, the need for an expanding nation to honor its God was expressed in the building of Solomon's temple.

On the other hand, by confining that God to a relatively safe—albeit holy—compound, the seeds were sown for the eventual downfall of the kingdom.

Which brings us back to the flip side of Scott's Law: No matter how right it looks, something will probably go wrong.