

The Church Ethic 312: A Study of All Biblical Prayers



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Note 5 – 1 Chronicles 28:9, 29:18-19 (and 2 Chronicles 2:12 and 1 Kings 8:58)

Chapters 28-29 of 1 Chronicles record a farewell address of sorts from King David to the congregation of Israel. As can be seen in verses 1-2 of chapter 28, the future building of the Temple is central to this speech. It is clear that David wanted to ensure that his heartfelt desire to build a house for God in Jerusalem would be carried out in the next generation after his passing. Not only does David proclaim Solomon to be his successor in this speech but he immediately connects Solomon's succession to Solomon's responsibility to build the Temple. This public address continues into chapter 29. In verse 10 of chapter 29, we find David includes a public prayer in his remarks before the people. It is verses 18-19 that raise intriguing questions concerning biblical expectations in prayer.

1 Chronicles 29:18 O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep (08104) (8798) this for ever (05769) in the (03336) of the thoughts (04284) of the heart (03824) of thy people (05971), and prepare (03559) (8685) their heart (03824) unto thee: 19 And give (05414) (8798) unto Solomon (08010) my son (01121) a perfect (08003) heart (03824), to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision.

Although there are also implications concerning David's prayer for the people in verse 18, the prayer for Solomon in verses 19 is more explicit. Consequently, we will examine the prayer regarding Solomon first and then examine verse 18 afterward.

The English translation of verse 19 recounts David saying, "Give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments" and build God's house. (The English translation reads, "and to build the palace," but the Hebrew word for "palace" is "biyrah," Strong's No. 01002, which is used in verse 1 of this same chapter to refer to the Temple.) To modern ears that are accustomed to Calvinistic doctrines, this English translation may initially appear to imply that David is praying that God will cause Solomon to choose to obey God's commands, to have a righteous heart that desires to obey God. There are many noteworthy points to consider here.

First, we have surveyed the Old Testament starting with the first verse of Genesis examining the expectations expressed in prayers. Prior to 1 Chronicles 29, there are 366 chapters and 11,195 verses that we have examined. And in those 366 chapters and 11,195 verses we have seen many different categorical types of prayers but there hasn't been a single hint of anyone praying for God to cause someone to choose obedience or for God to give someone a righteous heart. So, before we accept a Calvinistic interpretation of David's prayer and conclude that the first Calvinist prayer doesn't occur until the very end of 1 Chronicles, we might want to examine some of the evidence a little more closely.

Second, vocabulary is informative.

Number one, the Hebrew word for heart here is "lebab" (Strong's No. 03824). While "lebab" is often translated as "heart," it is clear that the muscular organ that pumps blood to the body is not in view here. "Lebab" could also be translated as "soul," but this also raises theological and philosophical questions about what precisely the soul is and what role it has in human decision making. Once these more poetic inferences are set aside, "lebab" literally refers to the mind. It is the seat of comprehension, knowledge, thinking, memory, the will, and various emotions and desires. Notice that this is a broad range of human mental faculties and, more importantly, that not every faculty is necessarily invoked by every instance of "lebab."

For example, Deuteronomy 11:18 commands, "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart (lebab) and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. 19 And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." This is clearly a reference to memory and knowledge in the sense of teaching and comprehension. It would be more difficult to interpret Deuteronomy 11:18 as a reference to emotions. The same can be said regarding the use of "lebab" in Deuteronomy 4:9, which says, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." This is another clear use of "lebab" in regard to memory in particular and certainly not in reference to things like emotions. Conversely, Deuteronomy 19:6 advises, "Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart (lebab) is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past." In this verse, the "lebab" is described as "hot" and associated with the sentiment of "hatred." Here the emotional faculty of the "lebab" is clearly in view and it would be very difficult to interpret Deuteronomy 19:6 in reference to either the memory or the knowledge faculties of the mind.

Consequently, when we come across "lebab" in David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:19, we must ask which faculties of the mind the context has in view. Is David referring to Solomon's will? Or is David referring to Solomon's knowledge and comprehension?

Number two, the Hebrew word for “perfect” in 1 Chronicles 29:19 is “shalem” (Strong’s No. 08003), which essentially means “whole” either in the sense of “completeness and finished” or “safe and unharmed” and includes the idea of being “at peace.” It does not necessarily convey the idea of “righteousness” even though English-speaking, modern ears might jump to such a perception when we hear the phrase “a perfect heart.” But most importantly, what must be acknowledged is that in terms of vocabulary, David’s prayer in Hebrew demands nothing other than a petition that God would give Solomon complete knowledge and comprehension regarding God’s commands and how to build the Temple.

At this point, we have established that a non-Calvinist interpretation is not only plausible, but it is well within the range of meaning of the original Hebrew. From here, we can examine other evidence to substantiate the proper meaning of this prayer.

Third, although there has not been any prayer from Genesis 1 to 1 Chronicles 28 that asks God to give someone a righteous heart or to cause them to obey his commands, we have seen that petitions for wisdom and understanding are a common category of prayers. This creates strong statistical evidence. In short, it is exceedingly more probable that David is praying for God to give Solomon complete comprehension of God’s commands and how to build the Temple rather than an utterly unheard of new type of prayer asking God to give Solomon a righteous heart and to cause Solomon to obey.

Fourth, there are several places in the surrounding context where David explicitly refers to the will. In chapter 28:21 and chapter 29:5, 6, 9, 14, and 17, David uses the related Hebrew words “nadiyb” (Strong’s No. 05081) and “nadab” (Strong’s No. 05068) to refer to the “voluntary” or “willing” actions of men. There are three noteworthy points to highlight here as well.

Number one, if “lebab” automatically invoked the idea of the will, David would not have had to attach other Hebrew words for “willingness” to “lebab.” “Lebab” would have been sufficient on its own to designate the will. Consequently, in this context when David wants to invoke the concept of human will, we see that he employs another word. From this contextual clue, we can perceive that David was using “lebab” to refer simply to the mind and he used “nadiyb” and “nadab” on the specific occasions when he wanted to invoke the idea of the will within the mind.

Number two, David’s use of “nadab” shows that he credits people for what they will to do, not God. In chapter 29:5, David asks the people “who is willing?” which is a rather obvious invitation for voluntary action. And in verses 6, 9, and 17, David repeatedly seeks to highlight to God that their actions are voluntary, as if he wants God to take note and give them credit. Verse 14 is similar although it includes the phrase “for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.” However, this phrase clearly refers to the amazing wealth of the gifts that the people gave. According to verses 6-8, the leaders of God’s people willingly

(“nadab”) offered “five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the LORD.” David’s remark in verse 14 is recognizing that God himself had given them all this wealth and that they did not deserve such a blessing. It simultaneously asks God to recognize their willingness to offer their wealth while acknowledging that God provided such wealth in the first place. But it nowhere infers that their will to offer it was given to them by God. There is simply no need for such a spurious suggestion. Ultimately, the fact that David (and the author of the passage) repeatedly credits the people before God for their willingness is contrary to the notion that David would have perceived that God was responsible for human decisions and willingness.

Number three, despite the fact that David explicitly invokes the idea of will twice in his prayer when giving credit to the people, he notably does not use “nadab” or any other word to invoke “willingness” when praying for Solomon’s “lebab” in verse 19. This suggests that David specifically did not intend to include Solomon’s will or willingness as part of his petition to God.

Fifth, near the beginning of his address in chapter 28:9, David instructs Solomon saying, “Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect (08003) heart (03820) and with a willing (02655) mind (05315).” These are the same Hebrew words for “perfect heart” that are used in David’s prayer in chapter 29:19 (“shalem” and “lebab”). Several issues require attention.

Number one, it is both reasonable and plausible that David would encourage his son to serve God with a complete, accurate understanding rather than in ignorance. After all, David himself had learned up close the dire consequences of serving God in ignorance particularly regarding priestly service and sacred things. In 1 Chronicles 13:6-12, David sought to move the ark of God and a man named Uzza died when he tried to steady the ark with his own hand. Later, in 1 Chronicles 14:12-13, David explained that this happened because they did not follow the correct procedure given by God. This was no doubt a painful lesson at the dangers of being ignorant of part of God’s instruction and the perils of serving God incompletely. And it is logical that David would have passed on that lesson to his son especially as he conferred on Solomon the responsibilities of the Temple.

Number two, in chapter 28:9 David actually lists a “willing mind” separately from the “perfect heart” using distinctly different Hebrew words. This confirms that David did not intend the phrase “perfect heart” to refer to the will. Consequently, he used another phrase to refer to the will. And since David is encouraging Solomon to serve God with a “willing mind,” this verse also indicates that David understood that it was under Solomon’s own power to do so or not. It would be contradictory for David to place responsibility on Solomon for choosing correctly in this verse and then petitioned God to cause Solomon to choose correctly in chapter 29.

Number three, David concludes this verse by making Solomon aware of the consequences for disregarding this instruction. He tells Solomon two things. First, David says that God will search Solomon's heart and know whether or not Solomon was being faithful. Not only would this be unnecessary if God was causing Solomon to be faithful but David certainly wouldn't infer that God would need to search Solomon to determine such a thing if David was momentarily going to petition God to cause Solomon to be faithful. Second, David warns Solomon that God will reward him if he is faithful and punish him if he is not. This statement also credits Solomon with responsibility for his own choice. Again, it would be contradictory to conclude that God would reward or punish Solomon if God himself was causing Solomon to obey or not.

Number four, David's comment in this verse begins with the phrase "know thou the God of thy father," which is itself instruction for Solomon to know or be familiar with something rather than being ignorant. This opening phrase itself confirms that David's focus relates to obtaining knowledge and confirms that the subsequent phrase "perfect heart" would likely expand that concept beyond just basic knowledge to a thorough understanding. Therefore, from the first line of this verse we find additional reason to interpret "perfect heart" instead to something more like "complete comprehension."

Sixth, Solomon is present as David gives this address and makes this prayer. Our theory, at this point, is that David was praying that God would help Solomon to gain a complete understanding regarding how to keep the Law of Moses and how to build the Temple. 1 Kings 2-3 records events very near in time to the events found in 1 Chronicles 28-29. Chapter 2:1 begins by stating that "the days of David drew night that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son." The chapter continues by describing the things that David told Solomon including to keep God's commands. Chapter 3 begins by saying that Solomon "made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD." After Solomon offers sacrifices, God appears to him in verse 5 and offers to give Solomon whatever he asks. What does Solomon ask for? Does he ask God for a righteous heart? Does he ask God to cause him to be devoted and obedient? No. Instead, in verses 7-9 Solomon describes himself as a mere child who "knows not how to go out or come in" and he asks God, "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern good and bad." The word Solomon uses for "heart" here is not "lebab" (Strong's No. 03824) but the closely related word "leb" (Strong's No. 03820), which similarly means "the mind, understanding, knowledge, thinking, etc." The two words are essentially synonyms. The word translated as "understanding" is the Hebrew word "shama" (Strong's No. 8085), which ranges in meaning from "hear to understand" to "listen" and even "obey." Of course, there is a significant difference between the idea of attentive, perceptive ears and obedience.

But we don't have to wonder whether Solomon was praying for perceptiveness or obedience. Number one, in verse 9 Solomon elaborates on his request by asking for the ability to "discern between good and bad" and make sound judgments. The

Hebrew word for “discern” that God uses here is, “biyn” (Strong’s No. 0995), which means “to discern, understand, consider.” These are requests that have to do with being perceptive, not with Solomon being obedient. Number two, in verses 11-12 God grants Solomon’s request and promises to give him wisdom. Number three, as both history and the bible record, Solomon was known for his wisdom and understanding, not his obedience and faithfulness. In fact, Solomon was regarded as so unfaithful and disobedient that God tore part of the kingdom of Israel away (1 Kings 4:29, 5:12, 11:4-11).

Ultimately, Solomon’s request for God to give him wisdom reflects his probable understanding of David’s prayer for him. Solomon had heard David advise him to serve God with a complete comprehension and he heard David pray that God would give Solomon complete comprehension. So, when God offered to give Solomon whatever he asked, Solomon followed his father’s advice and asked for wisdom.

Seventh, even if we suppose contrary to all this evidence that David was asking God to give Solomon a righteous heart and will, we would have to admit based on 1 Kings 11:4-11 that God most decisively did not grant this request. In other words, even if David’s prayer expressed an expectation regarding God controlling the human will and causing a man to obey, the fact that God didn’t cause Solomon to obey and remain faithful ultimately shows that such an expectation was faulty and presumptuous.

Eighth, on the other hand, if we interpret David’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:19 as a request for God to give Solomon a complete understanding of God’s commands and issues related to the Temple, then we can certainly conclude that God answered David’s prayer abundantly.

Together, these seventh and eight points bring us to a simple question. When 1 Chronicles 28-29 record this grand scene on which the aging King David nearing the end of his life and his reign summons all Israel to impress upon them his vision and plan for a Temple and to bestow that responsibility and his succession upon Solomon, does it make any sense for the author to record David making a prayer that God does not grant? Isn’t it more logical that David’s closing public prayer for his son and successor is meant by the authors to connect the dots and tie Solomon’s own prayer for wisdom and reception of that great wisdom to God answering the prayer of his faithful father David? Consequently, the answering (or failure to answer) David’s prayer itself confirms that David’s prayer was a request for God to give Solomon full comprehension, not a prayer for God to give Solomon righteous heart that desired obedience.

Ninth, thematic content from Solomon in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes offers secondary support for the idea that David not only impressed upon Solomon to seek after God in complete understanding (1 Chronicles 28:9) but also that David prayed for God to grant Solomon complete understanding (1 Chronicles 29:19). Not only does this make sense of the fact that Solomon requested wisdom when he could have asked God for anything else, but it also makes sense of Solomon’s

constant repetition in Proverbs about the importance of pursuing knowledge, wisdom, and understanding above all else. These are not just incidental aftereffects of Solomon's great wisdom. Rather, these emphatic sentiments are the result of what Solomon understood from David was most important. In fact, in Proverbs 4:1-13 Solomon begins to recount what his father taught him (verses 3-4) and it includes that "wisdom is the principle thing," "get wisdom, get understanding," and "Take fast hold of instruction."

In summary, we have a landslide of evidence demonstrating that David's use of the phrase "perfect heart" in his prayer for Solomon is best interpreted as "complete understanding" rather than "righteous heart, righteous desire, or righteous will." David is essentially praying for God to equip Solomon's cognitive perception regarding God's Laws and issues pertaining to the Temple, etc. Having established this, it is also necessary to cover one lingering ramification of this interpretation. This ramification stems from the fact that phrases similar to "perfect heart" (combining "shalem, 08003" and "lebab, 03824" or "leb, 03820") are used in assessments of both good and bad kings in the generations that follow David, including Solomon. (For example, 1 Kings 15:2-3 and 15:14.) As we have seen Solomon turns away from God to follow other gods. As a result, 1 Kings 11:4 concludes, "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father." Here several questions emerge.

Number one, does the fact that Solomon ultimately failed to have a "perfect heart" nullify our seventh and eighth points above? We have argued that David was not praying for a "righteous heart" for Solomon because Solomon's heart was not righteous. Conversely, we argued that David must have prayed for a "complete comprehension" for Solomon because God did give Solomon wisdom. But doesn't 1 Kings 11:4 indicate that God didn't grant Solomon whatever it was David requested, no matter how we interpret it? (It should be noted that this particular issue wouldn't overturn or reverse all of the proofs we provided above. It would simply remove points 7 and 8 from the list, leaving the issue to be decided on the other proofs.) Here the answer stems from the logical differences between God giving Solomon understanding and God giving Solomon a righteous heart.

We have already pointed out that David both advises Solomon to pursue God with a complete understanding in 1 Chronicles 28:9 and David prays that God will give Solomon complete understanding in 1 Chronicles 29:19. This naturally implies that the process is cooperative. Solomon must pursue understanding and God will endow Solomon if he does so. This was confirmed in 1 Kings 3 in which Solomon seeks wisdom and God grants it to him. In fact, 2 Chronicles 1 provides a parallel account of this prayer in which, after Solomon asks for wisdom, in verses 11-12 God responds, "Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches...neither long life; but has asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people...wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee." This answer from God affirms that God granted Solomon wisdom because Solomon first sought for wisdom. Not only does 2 Chronicles confirm that the process is

cooperative but also that God's action was in response to Solomon's choice rather than the cause of Solomon's choice. In short, in both 1 Kings 3 and 2 Chronicles 2, both God and Solomon play a part in Solomon's acquisition of wisdom. And this is not altogether dissimilar to any successful student-teacher arrangement, the teacher must be willing to impart knowledge but the student must also be willing to diligently attend to it and to act upon it. This is a simple, fundamental dynamic that in other contexts would not be controversial. And because of the cooperative nature of attaining knowledge, it is possible for God to grant David's request by giving Solomon understanding but for Solomon to eventually fail to keep up his end and stop serving God in accordance with all his wisdom. Consequently, because of this cooperative nature implied by 1 Chronicles 28:9 and 29:19, Solomon's failure does not imply God's failure to grant David's request. God gave the understanding David requested, but Solomon chose not to diligently act on it. This is, in fact, a common thing in scripture. God gives men revelation and knowledge and understanding and they do not diligently act upon it.

On the other hand, the notion of God granting Solomon a righteous heart in the sense of a righteous will is inherently not cooperative at all. At its core, this concept implies that God is the cause of Solomon's will particularly where doing righteousness is concerning. If Solomon fails to will and to do righteousness, it is simply and unavoidably must be because God has not given to him a righteous heart as David requested. Consequently, Solomon's departure into unrighteousness rules out the idea that God caused Solomon to will righteousness whereas Solomon's eventual failure to serve God in accordance with everything he understood does not undermine that God previously gave Solomon great understanding.

Number two, does the fact that Solomon falls short of David prove that this phrase does not refer to understanding given the fact that Solomon's wisdom exceeded David's wisdom? This depends on whether we are comparing David and Solomon solely in terms of quantity. So long as the phrase "complete understanding" conveys both quantity of knowledge and the degree of fidelity to that knowledge, there is no conflict. While Solomon certainly had more wisdom and understanding than David, he did not serve God in accordance with everything he understood. David, while knowing less, still served God in greater accordance with the understanding that he had. Thus, the phrase "complete understanding" can still refer to knowledge and understanding and David can be counted as serving God in more complete accordance with knowledge than Solomon. And such sentiments are in conformity to passages in the Bible that convey men are judged in part in proportion to their faithfulness to the knowledge that is given to them (Leviticus 4:2-28, 5:15-29, Luke 12:47-48, John 15:22, Acts 17:30).

Number three, does the interpretation "complete understanding" make sense when applied as an assessment of subsequent kings? In the same sense that David can be compared to Solomon, this interpretation makes perfect sense. Simply put, the kings would be assessed on how completely they served God in accordance with what they knew. In fact, the interpretation of "lebab" as "understanding" even

makes sense of passages like 1 Samuel 13:14, which describes David as “a man after God’s own heart (03824).” The Hebrew word for “heart” here is “lebab” and, in this model, the phrasing here would describe David as a man after God’s own understanding. It would describe his zeal for accurate knowledge of God’s commands. And, of course, in this sense 1 Samuel 13 would be perfectly consistent with what we’ve seen so far, David impressing upon Solomon the importance of Solomon seeking wisdom and understanding of God first above all else just as Proverbs 4:1-13 describes. David would be impressing upon Solomon to hold fast to the principle characteristic for which God took David from shepherding sheep to be king over all Israel.

Finally, having given some rigorous and technical analysis to the phrase “perfect heart” used in 1 Chronicles 28:9 and 29: 19, it is perhaps important to translate our findings back out of technical analysis and back into a readable, common phrasing. We have set aside the more poetic rendering of “perfect heart” found in the King James Version largely due to the ill-defined connotation of the word “heart.” We have seen that the Hebrew word for “perfect” conveys the idea of “complete or finished” and the Hebrew word for “heart” denotes the knowing, comprehending, and thinking faculties of the mind. But we are not left with overly cumbersome or technical explanations as a replacement. For example, in light of these findings the phrase “full understanding” seems like a reasonable and natural rendering in English, which reflects the nuances of the meaning established by the context of this passage. In addition, this rendering works very well for both occurrences of this phrase in chapter 28:9 and chapter 29:19. Chapter 28:9 would have David advising his son Solomon, “Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a full understanding and a willing mind.” And chapter 29:19 would have David praying to God on behalf of Solomon asking God, “give unto Solomon my son a full understanding.” Consequently, this example of an alternative translation maintains both the clarify of the contextual meaning and the consistent meaning required by the use of the same phrase in both verses. In both cases, David is speaking concerning the fullness of Solomon’s understanding or knowledge concerning the things of God. He does not want Solomon to serve God in ignorance and he is asking God to provide thorough knowledge and wisdom to Solomon.

Now that we have addressed David’s prayer concerning Solomon in 1 Chronicles 29:19, we should also say a few words about David’s prayer in verse 18 regarding the people.

1 Chronicles 29:16 O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own. 17 I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. 18 **O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart (03824) of thy people, and prepare (06965) their heart (03824) unto thee:** 19 And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy

testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision.

The key phrase in verse 18 is the segment in which David asks God to “keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee.” A few noteworthy items must be considered.

First, the word heart that appears twice in this verse is “lebab,” the same word we have seen previously used in this passage to refer to the understanding. Here it is attached to the Hebrew word “yetser,” (Strong’s No. 03336) for “imagination” and “machashabah” (Strong’s No. 04284) for “thoughts.” Interestingly, the words “yetser” and “machashabah” are first used in Genesis 6:5, which says, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination (03336) of the thoughts (04284) of his heart (03820) was only evil continually.” (The word for “heart” in Genesis 6 is not “lebab” but its closely related synonym “leb,” and the lexicon refers to “leb” as “a form of 03824,” which is “lebab.”)

Second, David is not asking God to “give” the people imaginations or thoughts. Rather, he uses the Hebrew word “shamar” (Strong’s No. 08104). This word can convey either, “to keep, preserve, guard” or to “observe, give heed.” This again is similar to Genesis 6:5 in which God observed the evil imaginations and thoughts of men’s hearts.

Third, David uses the same word for “imagination” in chapter 28:9, in which he says, “the LORD searcheth all hearts (03824), and understandeth all the imaginations (03336) of the thoughts (04284). In this verse, we know that David is talking about things that God observes or perceives, not things that God causes.

And fourth, we must ask what it is that the people have in their thoughts and in their minds that David wants to commend them for before God and which David wants God to take note of and remember. The answer this simple and obvious question comes just a few verses earlier. In verses 14-16, David declares “Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.” What is it that David and the people have offered? According to verses 6-8, the people offered five thousand talents and ten thousand drams of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of brass, one hundred talents of iron, and precious stones “to the treasure of the house of the LORD.” Verse 9 immediately states that David rejoiced at their offering of such a generous gift. In short, David is giving God credit for making the people wealthy and he is asking God to credit the people for their willingness to offer that wealth back to God for the work of the Temple. As such, in verse 16, David states “all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand.” He gives the people credit for donating and God credit for providing them with such wealth in the first place. Consequently, when David prays in verse 18 that God would take note for all time the imaginations and thoughts in the minds of the people, it is clear from the context that David wants God to note the people’s intent to build the Temple.

Consequently, when we pull these three factors together, a clear picture emerges. In contrast to occasions like Genesis 6:5 in which God observed that the imaginations and thoughts of men's minds were evil, David is asking God to look down and observe (and forever keep before him) that on this occasion the Jewish people had righteous thoughts and purposes in their minds to build the Temple for God to dwell among them.

This leaves only the subsequent phrase that finishes up this verse, which reads, "prepare their heart (03824) unto thee." Once again, a few items are worth noting.

First, in the context it is clear that this preparation is a consequence of God observing their righteous thoughts. This again contrasts with Genesis 6:5-7 in which God decides to destroy the earth as a result of his observation of man's wickedness. Here, David is asking for the opposite. He is asking God to observe man (the Jewish people in particular) and do good toward them.

Second, the Hebrew word translated as "prepare" is "kuwn" (Strong's No. 03559). It can mean "to establish" but it can also convey "to prepare." In this sense, its essential meaning is probably close to the English phrase "set up" which can likewise convey both the sense of standing something up and also the sense of preparing.

Third, while a Calvinistic interpretation might suggest that "kuwn" reflects God acting on their hearts to cause them to do righteousness, the context prohibits this because David places God's observation of their current righteous thoughts before he asks God to prepare them. Simply put, God's action in this phrase follows God's observation of the people's intentions. It does not come before or cause their intentions. The righteousness in the minds of the people exists before God's "preparation" of their minds and, therefore, God's preparation is not in this verse the cause of their righteousness. To the contrary, David appears to be asking God to do something for the people based on the merit of their existing righteousness.

Fourth, it is important to remember that in the immediate context David has already identified in particular those things that are in the mind of the people that are the focus of his words. The previous part of this verse has denoted that the people have in their minds the imaginations and in the thoughts to build God a house on earth to dwell among men. In this way, their minds were already "for God." Consequently, in this context, when David asks God to "set up" or "establish" their minds, he clearly is asking God to bring about the building of the Temple, which the people's minds were set upon. He is essentially asking God "establish what is in the minds of the people," ensure the bringing to pass the building of the Temple, which the people so desired at that time. David is not asking God to do something "to" their minds. Rather, he is asking God to do something "with" what is already on their minds, the building of the Temple.

Fifth, this interpretation is confirmed by the deliberately contrasting statement made by Solomon concerning David in 2 Chronicles 6:7-10 in celebratory

declaration at the completion of the Temple. In 2 Chronicles 6:7-10, Solomon explains, “7 Now it was in the heart (03824) of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 8 But the LORD said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart (03824) to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart (03824): 9 Notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house; but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name. 10 The LORD therefore hath performed (06965) his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.”

There are three confirming facts from 2 Chronicles 6. First, Solomon uses the word “lebab” (Strong’s No. 03824) to refer to what was in David’s mind to do. Second, in verse 8 God gives David credit for having this righteous desire in mind rather than crediting Himself for David’s desire. And third, in verse 10 Solomon says that God “hath performed” these things including the building of the Temple. The Hebrew word for performed is “quwm” (Strong’s No. 06965), “not “kuwn” (Strong’s No. 03559) which is used in 1 Chronicles 29:18. However, the two words are virtually synonymous. As we have seen, “kuwn” can mean “to be set up” and we argued for that meaning in 1 Chronicles 29:18. Likewise, “quwm” means “to rise, stand up.” So, by using a different word reflecting the completion of the David’s plan, Solomon has clarified his father’s meaning in 1 Chronicles 29:18. In David’s case, God credited him for having the building of the Temple in mind, but God refused to bring this work to pass in David’s lifetime. David prayed that God would recognize that the people had embraced the plan to build the temple and that God would bring it to pass after his death. God did so and Solomon acknowledged that when David prayed God would “set up or establish” (kuwn) the Temple that was in the mind of the people, God indeed had “raised up or stood up” (quwm) that plan and that Temple.

To summarize in closing, despite the English rendering of phrases like “give unto Solomon a perfect heart” in translations such as the King James, the underlying Hebrew vocabulary and the immediate context demonstrate that David’s intended meaning has no trace of Calvinistic inferences. David is not asking God to give or to cause Solomon (or the people) to have righteous hearts, righteous desires, or righteous wills. David is discussing the importance of serving God with a complete and thorough understanding of God’s commands and, in this case, priestly Temple activities. He is commending the people for their existing willingness to attend to these righteous tasks, asking God to take note of that existing willingness, and asking God to establish those righteous things that the people themselves intended to do. In neither the case of Solomon nor the case of the people does David depict God as the source of their choices or their righteous intentions, only the source of the wealth and resources that the people voluntarily offered. And in emphasizing the need for knowledge and petitioning God to give knowledge, David is offering a petition well within the common category of prayers seen from Genesis to 1 Chronicles in which men look to God to provide information and wisdom. David is not offering an entirely new type of prayer

never before seen from Genesis to 1 Chronicles in which God is expected to cause men to will or choose something righteous.

Furthermore, we may also consider a possible alternative or complementary conclusion regarding David's prayerful request about the people's imaginations and hearts. A survey of the early uses of the verb "shamar" (08104, "keep") shows that it can and is used to communicate the idea of "watching over" something. This precedent would mean that David is here requesting that God would be ever attentive to and watch over the "yester" (intents, imaginations) expressed by the people. As we have seen, in this setting, the intent of the people was to build a house so that God would dwell among them. This linguistic analysis leads toward the conclusion that David is not only asking God to take note of the people's expressed desire for God to dwell among them and to build a house for that purpose but also for God to be forever attentive to and watch over the Temple, which was the actualization of that intent. In fact, 2 Chronicles 6:20 in the inauguration ceremony after the Temple was completed (2 Chronicles 5:1-2), Solomon petitions God that "Thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldst put thy name." Likewise, one chapter later in 2 Chronicles 7:16, God answers Solomon, saying, "For now have I chosen and sanctified this house that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." (For more details, see 1 Kings 8:15-17, 29, 9:1-3, 2 Chronicles 6:4-6, 20, 12-16.) Consequently, it would be reasonable to conclude that Solomon understood David's prayer for God to "keep" the "yester" of the people simply meant that God would keep watch over the Temple that was in their hearts and minds to build. We might also consider whether "kuwn" ("prepare") is meant to refer to God giving the people understanding ("prepare their heart") so that they could construct the appropriate building in accordance with God's will. There is precedent for this idea as well. When the tabernacle and all its accompanying items were constructed at the time of Moses, God gave wisdom to particular craftsman and artisans so that they could fabricate the necessarily items in accordance with God's requirements (Ex. 28:3, 31:3, 35:31).

Similarly, we might take an opportunity to comment regarding the blessing of Hiram the king of Tyre in 2 Chronicles 2:12. In this passage, Hiram declares, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, that made heaven and earth, who hath given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding, that might build an house of the LORD." Of course, Hiram's blessing fits perfectly with the interpretation we have established regarding David's advice and prayer for Solomon. Just as David had instructed Solomon to seek wisdom and knowledge and asked God to give Solomon such wisdom and knowledge, here Hiram expresses thanks that God has indeed given these things to Solomon. Nothing in Hiram's remarks infer or even hint that God had done so unilaterally. No do Hiram's remarks overturn the previous chapter which clearly denotes that God gave Solomon wisdom as a response to, rather than as a cause of, Solomon's desire for wisdom.

Lastly, we should also consider a similar petition in 1 Kings 8:58.

1 Kings 8:57 The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: 58 **That he may incline our hearts (03824) unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.**

Here there are two strong possibilities regarding Solomon's meaning.

Number one, it is possible that Solomon is praying for God to prosper the people rather than bring them into subjugation to foreign nations where they would serve foreign gods.

First, the reference to "incline our hearts" particularly in close proximity to the reference to the fathers is similar to 1 Chronicles 29, which mentions also the patriarchs and uses the phrase "prepare their heart" with regard to the people in verse 18. As we can see, both passages are using the same Hebrew word "lebab" (03824), translated in English as "heart." On this note, it is not surprising that on the day Solomon and the people completed the building of the Temple, Solomon might intentionally reiterate the same basic prayer that his father David made concerning the people and the building of the Temple in 1 Chronicles 29. David no doubt told Solomon about all of his preparations, plans, and desires concerning the people and the Temple. He may have even told Solomon about his prayers as well. But more likely, Solomon himself was probably present when David made his important prayer.

Second, if Solomon is merely reiterating David's prayer, then we might conclude that Solomon is extending the same sentiments. We have already noted that an important early part of David's prayer was his invitation for God to behold that the people were willing to build the Temple. We saw this explicitly and repeatedly in 1 Chronicles 28:21 and 29:6, 6, 9, 14 and 17. In that context, David's prayer for God to "prepare" the people's hearts was really a petition for God to establish or bring to pass their intention to build the Temple. Many people have dreams or goals for the future. Their goal was to build the Temple. David was praying, not that God would cause them to have this goal, but that God would establish the goal that was already in their hearts or minds. How appropriate it would be for Solomon to commemorate David's prayer after the people had fulfilled their willingness by actually building the Temple and that God would likewise continue to bring to pass the intention of their minds to follow his ways. On that note, the act of building the Temple is certainly an expression of the desire the people had to be God's people and to have a close relationship with God in accordance with His covenant. It would make sense for Solomon to pray for God to favor his people on that basis and so facilitate that righteous goal that they expressed by building the Temple in the first place.

Third, we still need to determine in what specific way Solomon and David expected God to facilitate or establish the people's existing intention to keep God's covenant. The answer comes from Deuteronomy 29, right after chapter 28

in which God proclaims the blessings or curses that He will bring on the people depending on if they obey His commands or disobey them.

Deuteronomy 29:9 Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do. 10 Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, 11 Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: 12 That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: 13 **That he may establish (06965) thee to day for a people unto himself,** and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn **unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.**

Number one, notice the similarities to the prayers of both David and Solomon. First, verse 13 invokes God's relationship with the patriarchs, just as David and Solomon do in their prayers. Second, verse 13 also uses the word "establish," which is the Hebrew word "quwm" (06965). Although this is different word than "kuwn" (03559), which is used in 1 Chronicles 29:18, the two words are somewhat similar in meaning. "Quwm" means, "to stand up" and "kuwn" means, "to establish or to set up." And third, verse 9 refers to the "words of this covenant" just as Solomon refers to the "his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers" in 1 Kings 8:58. These similarities tell us that David and Solomon had God's promises and warnings from Deuteronomy in mind when they made these prayers.

Number two, notice that the blessings found in Deuteronomy 29 are conditional and depend on the people choosing to keep God's commands. This is what we are seeing in David and Solomon's prayers as well. David invited God to behold the people's willingness to give generously to build the Temple. And Solomon is speaking to God just as the people have fulfilled their efforts and desire to build that Temple. David and Solomon are clearly attempting to petition God that the people are meeting the condition for God to do good to them.

Number three, notice in verse 13 the phrase "that he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself." God promised that if the people of Israel kept his covenant, he would establish them as a nation. We see this very clearly spelled out in the preceding chapter, Deuteronomy 28. Notice that in verse, God promises to elevate Israel above all the other nations if they obey him.

Deuteronomy 28:12 The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: **and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. 13 And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God,** which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: 14 And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words

which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

The contrasting alternative is described later in verses 36 and 63 of the same chapter. Verse 15 begins the list of curses that God will bring upon Israel if they do not obey them.

Deuteronomy 28:15 But it shall come to pass, **if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee...****36** **The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone.** **37** And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee...**63** And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. **64** **And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.**

As we can see, God clearly declared that if the people did not obey his commands, he would bring them into servitude in other nations where they would serve other gods. So, we have two conditional options. If the people obeyed, God would make them the head of nations. If the people disobeyed, the people would be subjugated by other nations under whom they would serve false gods.

When we bring these factors together, we can see one possible answer to our question. How did David and Solomon expect God to “prepare” or “establish” the people’s desire to keep his covenant? David and Solomon believed that the people’s desire to build the Temple was a clear fact they could point to before God as a basis to ask God to pour out the blessings He’d promised if they obeyed Him in Deuteronomy 28-29. In turn, to establish the prosperity and security of the nation was a means to prevent the people from turning away from God to idolatry. This is what Solomon means when he says in 1 Kings 8, “The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.” Solomon isn’t petitioning God to unilaterally initiate the people’s desire to obey Him. Solomon is citing the people’s willingness to obey expressed in building the Temple as a basis to petition God to further secure their obedience, not by internally controlling their will, but by being “with them” to prosper and protect them in order to prevent them from being subject to other nations who would cause them to serve other gods.

(In fact, in the case of David’s prayer, it was the peace and prosperity that God brought during Solomon’s early reign that facilitated building the Temple. So,

when David prayed in 1 Chronicles 29:18 that God would establish what was in the mind of the people (to build the Temple), David was praying for God to bring about the kind of circumstances that would allow the people to do what they intended. And God did! 1 Kings 2:12 and 46 declare, “Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was established greatly” and “the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.” The prosperity under Solomon’s reign was an answer to David’s prayer and facilitated the people’s desire to build the Temple.)

Number two, another, perhaps stronger possibility is that Solomon is simply petitioning God to do for the people in general what David had petitioned God to do for Solomon specifically. In other words, it is a petition for God to increase understanding. We have already seen how the word “lebab” (03824) by definition refers to a man’s understanding. When Solomon asks God to “natah” or “stretch out” or “extend” the understanding of the people, he would simply be mirroring the prayer of his father David, who prayed for God to equip Solomon’s understanding regarding God’s Laws and issues pertaining to the Temple, etc. In addition, we also saw that David advised Solomon to pursue God with a complete understanding in 1 Chronicles 28:9. No doubt, Solomon understood from David that better knowledge about God was necessary in order to serve God more adequately. Paul articulates a similar concept in Romans 10:14-17, when he asserts that knowledge of the truth is a prerequisite to believing and following it. Likewise, it would make perfect sense for Solomon to perceive that increasing the people’s knowledge about God would help better prepare them to walk in the truth. Once again, we can see that there is nothing about the language of the prayer that requires Calvinistic notions in which God unilaterally causes men to do right or have a correct attitude or desire. Instead, this is a simple prayer for God to provide knowledge and understanding.

Note 6 – Esther 4:16, 5:2

Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: **and if I perish, I perish.**

Esther 5:2 And it was so, **when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre** that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.

In Esther 4, Esther’s uncle Mordecai instructs her to go before the king and petition on behalf of the Jews after Haman had obtained the king’s permission to destroy them all. In verse 11, Esther expresses her apprehension, noting that anyone who approaches the king “not called” is subject to death. But in verse 16, she agrees to her uncle’s request and it is the content of her reply that raises a cause for consideration. In verse 16, Esther responds to her uncle, saying, “Go,

gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise.”

The question could arise here whether or not Esther, her uncle, and the rest of the Jews are fasting to petition God to cause the king to spare Esther’s life. Several comments are worth making here.

First, even if Esther and the Jews are petitioning God for her safety, it would not necessarily entail Calvinistic notions.

Number one, God could conceivably arrange circumstances to influence the king’s decision to call her by means other than internally controlling the king’s will. For example, perhaps the counsel of the wise men to expel Queen Vashti may have been directed by some sort of divination or consultation of divinities. It would not have been unusual for wise men to commune with so-called gods for insight. And God could easily have interfered or sent angels to advise the course of action that was taken against Vashti. Although this example would require that God foreknew the prayers of Esther and her people and coordinated earlier events in anticipation of answering those prayers, foreknowledge of this kind is certainly well within Judeo-Christian thinking as recorded in scripture. But more importantly, this example illustrates how God could have arranged events to set the king up for regret and hesitation about losing another queen and, in turn, influenced the king to grant Esther an audience when he saw her approaching without God resorting to internal control of the king’s will in any Calvinist fashion.

Number two, God could conceivably have granted deliverance to Esther in some other manner that did not involve the decision of the king whatsoever. Scripture is filled with descriptions of God supernaturally delivering his people from ungodly rulers who sought to destroy them. It would not be out of the ordinary for Esther and her people to be petitioning for God to deliver her by means of God himself or angels coming to protect her even if the king responded unfavorably.

Second, it is not entirely clear from the passage that Esther is petitioning for her safety, which would subsequently unravel any implication that God would influence the will of the king. As we have seen in our survey, prayers requesting wisdom from God are quite common in scripture. It is entirely possible that Esther’s prayer in verse 16 is a request for God to help her find some wise words or wise strategy for how to persuade the king. And, in fact, chapter 5 does go on to describe in detail the rather crafty approach that Esther takes to overturn Haman’s plans.

Moving forward, we arrive at chapter 5:2. Here, the text reads, “And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.” The question here

is whether the phrase “she obtained favour in his sight” indicates that God did something to cause the king to respond this way.

First, it is worth noting that the text does not say, “God gave her favour in his sight.” It merely states that she has favor with the king without saying how, why, or when she obtained it.

Second, the King James English translation uses the word “obtained,” which is phrased in a way that could convey she only received favor at that moment and not before. However, the Hebrew word for “obtained” is “nasa” (Strong’s No. 05375), which conveys “to bear, to carry, to take” and includes “to sustain and to endure.” For instance, in Genesis 4:13 Cain uses the word “nasa” to complain that his punishment is more than he can “bear.” The verse immediately following makes it clear that Cain is afraid he will not be able to live with this punishment, to endure with it for a long period of time, because someone will find him and kill him. In Genesis 29:1, this same word is used to refer to Jacob “going” on a journey. And in Genesis 36:7, it is used to describe how the land could not “sustain” all the people and cattle in Esau’s household. While there are other nuances to the meaning of this word, these examples illustrate that it can and does convey the idea of something borne or sustained for a duration. And in this case, since chapter 3:15 uses this same phrase including “nasa” (Strong’s No. 05375) to inform us that Esther had already obtained favor at the time when the king chose a new queen, context suggests that the use of “nasa” in chapter 5:2 conveys that Esther sustained or continued to bear the favor she had earlier received. The text certainly does not necessitate that she received favor anew at that moment as if it was something she did not already possess.

Third, we must ask a simple question. Is divine intervention the only or even the best explanation for why the king has favor toward Esther on this occasion?

We must keep in mind the timeframe of these events, particularly the proximity this has to their marriage and the amount of time that transpired in waiting for their marriage. Chapter 1:3 tells us that the events leading to the removal of Queen Vashti occurred in the third year of the king’s reign, which verse 4 describes as lasting for “an hundred and fourscore days.” Then we have the following timing cues. Verse 5 says “when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days.” Chapter 2:1 begins with the phrase “after these things” in reference to the expulsion of Vashti, but it provides no identification of the day, month, or year. Verse 12 of chapter 2 indicates that 12 months passed during the process of selecting a new queen. And then verse 17 states that “Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.” Next, in verse 21 we read that “in those days” Esther’s uncle Mordecai discovers a plot to kill the king, reports it, the king is saved, and the perpetrators are put to death. But again, no timeframe is given in terms of days, months, or years. Chapter 3:1 begins with the phrase “After these things” but there is still no timeframe given in terms of days, months, or years. This chapter unfolds Haman’s interaction with Mordecai and his plot to kill

Mordecai and all his people. Then, finally we arrive at another reference to the specific time of year. Verse 7 states that “In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus,” lots were cast for Haman to determine which day of the year to destroy the Jewish people. The twelfth month, Adar, is selected. In verse 13, we find that the exact date is the thirteenth day of Adar. In chapter 4:11, Esther says that it has been 30 days since she has been called before the king. And finally, in verse 16, Esther describes her intent to fast for 3 days and nights. Chapter 5 begins by saying that “on the third day” she went in before the king.

From these cues, we can now reconstruct the timetable. Number one, it is clear that the entire period from chapter 1 to chapter 5 spans nearly 9 years starting with the 180 days of feasting in the third year of the king until Haman casts lots in Nisan, the first month, of the twelfth year of the king in chapter 3. Number two, the critical segment is from the tenth month of the seventh year of the king’s reign until the month of Nisan at the beginning of the twelfth year. This is very near to the end of the seventh year, which means that we are only counting years 8, 9, 10, and 11 as full years, resulting in just essentially a 4-year period since Esther has been made queen. Number three, it would appear that the king was without a queen for possibly as many as 3 or 4 years from the removal of Vashti until Esther was made queen. That’s nearly the same length of time that he has been married to Esther by chapter 3. And number four, it is clear that the process for selecting a new queen was time-consuming and lengthy. It took 12 at least 12 months according to chapter 2:12.

Finally, two other items must be noted. Number one, chapter 2:17 states, “And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.” This statement lets us know that Esther already had the king’s favor prior the chapter 5. This requires us to ask if we have definitive reason to conclude that Esther had lost this favor and was in need of having it restored. Number two, although we know that it had been 30 days since Esther had seen the king, we simply do not know why it has been 30 days. While it could be suggested that the king was unhappy with her, it very well could have been circumstantial. The king could simply have been preoccupied with matters of state. Esther’s warning about the thirty days only reflects her uncertainty about this issue, her lack of information. She is speculating and worried. This is why Esther’s closing line in chapter 4:16 expresses an “if” regarding how the king will respond. Such speculation by its nature cannot constitute actual knowledge or certainty regarding her status before the king. Esther does not know and, consequently, neither can we as readers say that we know the king was either pleased or displeased with her. We simply have no evidence in this regard and it would be wrong to derive a particular conclusion on this matter based on something that we have to assume.

With this information in mind, we can pull together the whole picture. The king goes presumably years without a queen after Vashti is removed. It takes at least a year to find a new queen. Finding a new queen is a painstaking, long process. The

king has already found Esther to be superior to every other eligible woman in the kingdom. She is already stated to have favor in his eyes. And, based on precedent from Vashti, the removal of Esther could possibly take another 4 years to replace her which would be more than a decade and a half into the king's reign. Is it likely that after only four years of marriage the king would have grown so unfavorable to Esther that he would be willing to go back through the same painstaking, long process to find a new queen who is very unlikely to surpass Esther? Or, is it more probable that the king, having loved Esther so much "above all the women" of his kingdom, being already over a decade into his reign, and knowing the amount of time and energy that would be lost to find a new presumably inferior queen, would readily trigger Esther's execution? And given the fact that what angered the king most about Vashti was her refusal to be in his presence when she was summoned, after all the trouble of replacing Vashti, is it likely that the king would be angered by a queen who instead couldn't wait to be in his presence, whether summoned or not? Isn't that the very opposite of what angered the king in the first place?

Since the text does not directly ascribe credit to God for Esther's favor before the king in chapter 5:2, it would seem the book of Esther has provided ample evidence presenting the king's welcoming response to Esther as a matter of the natural course of events without any need for supernatural intervention or divine compulsion to account for it. Ultimately, Esther 4 and 5 do not provide any reliable hints suggesting a prayerful expectation for God to control anyone's will or actions.

Note 7 – Job 10:8-12

Job 10:8 Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. 9 Remember, I beseech thee, **that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?** 10 **Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?**

In verses 8-12, Job declares how God has shaped him, made him, and gave him life. He also refers to how in God's "providence" God watched over him. However, there really isn't much to analyze here. It is clear that Job is physically afflicted with illnesses that are harming his body (Job 1:7-8, 7:5). In this context, there is clearly no warrant to apply Job's remarks to anything along the lines of God shaping his decisions, etc. Rather, Job is referring to God's role in the formation of the human body and juxtaposing that to the proposition that God was now destroying his body by means of this sickness. Even the reference to God's providence (a term Calvinists might use as a synonym for divine direction of human affairs) in this context only implies God's oversight or protection to keep Job from physical harm. There is again no basis for asserting a more comprehensive control of human affairs on a meticulous level or universal level or internally over human decisions.