

Solomon

The biblical King Solomon was known for his wisdom, his wealth and his writings. He became ruler in approximately 967 BCE and his kingdom extended from the Euphrates River in the north to Egypt in the south. His crowning achievement was the building of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Almost all knowledge of him is derived from the biblical books of Kings I and Chronicles II.

Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba. Solomon was not the oldest son of David, but David promised Bathsheba that Solomon would be the next king. When David's elder son Adonijah declared himself king, David ordered his servants to bring Solomon to the Gihon spring where the priest anointed him while David was still alive. Solomon inherited a considerable empire from his father.

At first Solomon was faced with opposition. Two of David's closest advisors, Joab son of Zeruiah and the priest Abiathar, sided with Adonijah. When Adonijah came to Solomon and requested the king's servant as a wife, Solomon saw that this was a veiled threat to take over his kingdom and sent a messenger to kill Adonijah. He banished Abiathar to the city of Anathoth. Solomon then followed his father's last instructions in which David had ordered him to kill both Joab and one of his father's enemies, Shimei son of Gera. Solomon thus overcame the last potential threats to his kingdom. He then appointed his friends to key military, governmental and religious posts.

Solomon accumulated enormous wealth. He controlled the entire region west of the Euphrates and had peace on his borders. Kings I states that he owned 12,000 horses with horsemen and 1,400 chariots. Remains of stalls for 450 horses have, in fact, been found in Megiddo. Solomon strengthened his kingdom through marital alliances. Kings I records that he had 700 wives and 300 concubines, although some regard this number as an exaggeration. He had a large share in the trade between northern and southern countries. He established Israelite colonies around his province to look after military, administrative and commercial matters. The empire was divided into twelve districts, with Judah constituting its own political unit and enjoying certain privileges.

Although Solomon was young, he soon became known for his wisdom. The first and most famous incident of his cleverness as a judge was when two women came to his court with a baby whom both women claimed as their own. Solomon threatened to split the baby in half. One woman was prepared to accept the decision, but the other begged the King to give the live baby to the other woman. Solomon then knew the second woman was the mother.

People from surrounding nations also came to hear Solomon's wisdom. He composed 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. He wrote the Song of Songs, the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

One of the most celebrated visits to Solomon was that of the Queen of Sheba, who came from southern Arabia. Historically, Arabia was a country rich in gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Solomon needed Sheba's products and trade routes; the queen of Sheba needed

Solomon's cooperation in marketing her country's goods. The queen came to Solomon with camels carrying spices, gold and precious stones. She asked him questions and riddles and was amazed at his wisdom.

Once Solomon's empire was tranquil, he began to build the Holy Temple. He received wood from King Hiram of Tyre and imposed a compulsory labour service on both the Israelites and the foreign nations that were under his control. His workers built the structure of the Temple, its decorations and its vessels. The Temple took seven years to complete. It was built of stone and cedar, carved within and overlaid with pure gold. When it was done, Solomon dedicated the Temple in a public ceremony of prayers and sacrifices.

Solomon was also renowned for his other building projects in which he used slave labor from the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. He spent 13 years building his own palace, and also built a city wall, a citadel called the Millo, a palace for the daughter of Pharaoh (who was one of his wives) and facilities for foreign traders. He erected cities for chariots and horsemen and created storage cities. He extended Jerusalem to the north and fortified cities near the mountains of Judah and Jerusalem.

Solomon's downfall came in his old age. He had taken many foreign wives, whom he allowed to worship other gods. He even built shrines for the sacrifices of his foreign wives. Within Solomon's kingdom, he placed heavy taxation on the people, who became bitter. He also had the people work as soldiers, chief officers and commanders of his chariots and cavalry. He granted special privileges to the tribes of Judah and this alienated the northern tribes. The prophet Ahijah of Shiloh prophesied that Jeroboam son of Nebat would become king over ten of the 12 tribes, instead of one of Solomon's sons. Outside Solomon's kingdom, Hadad, of the royal family of Edom, rose up as an adversary of Israel. Rezon son of Eliada, ruler of Aram also fought Solomon, and created tension between the two kingdoms that was to last even after Solomon's reign ended. Solomon died in Jerusalem after 40 years as ruler of Israel. He was buried in the City of David. His son, Rehoboam succeeded him as king. Under Rehobaum's rule, Solomon's empire was lost and his kingdom was divided into two parts.