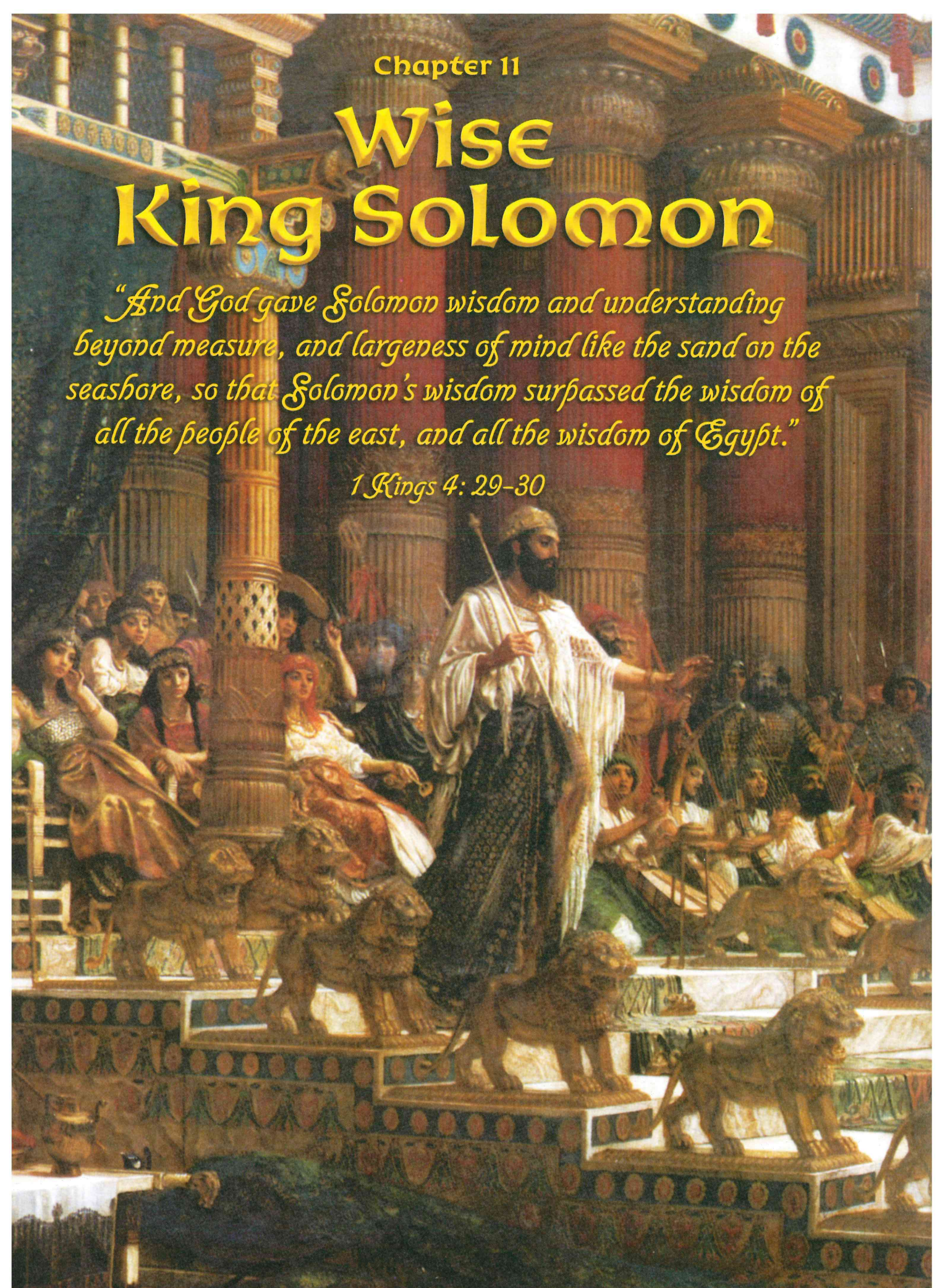


Chapter 11

Wise King Solomon

"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt."

1 Kings 4: 29-30



Chapter 11

Wise King Solomon



Read

2 Chronicles

1:1 - 2:6

1 Kings 10:1-10

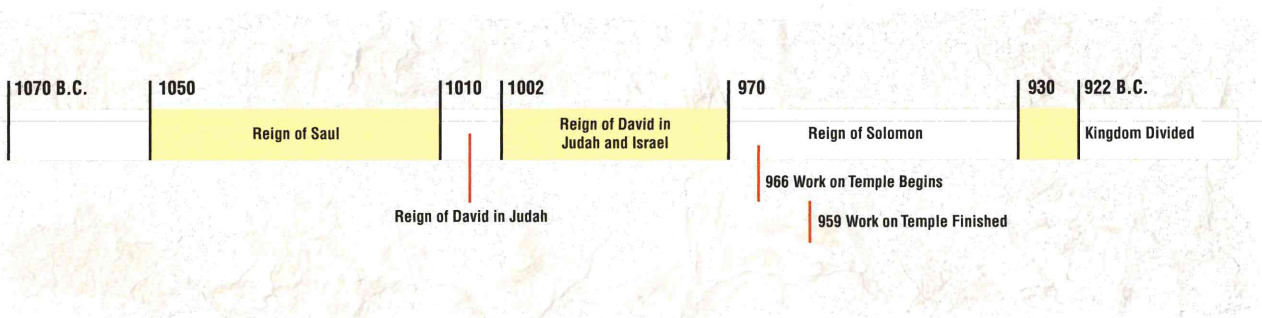
11:1 - 13

Proverbs 10

After David died and Solomon was firmly established on the throne, God appeared to Solomon in a dream.

In that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said to God, "Thou hast shown great and steadfast love to David my father, and hast made me king in his stead. O LORD God, let thy promise to David my father be now fulfilled, for thou hast made me king over a people as many as the dust of the earth. Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before these people, for who can rule this thy people, that is so great?" (2 Chr 1: 7-10)

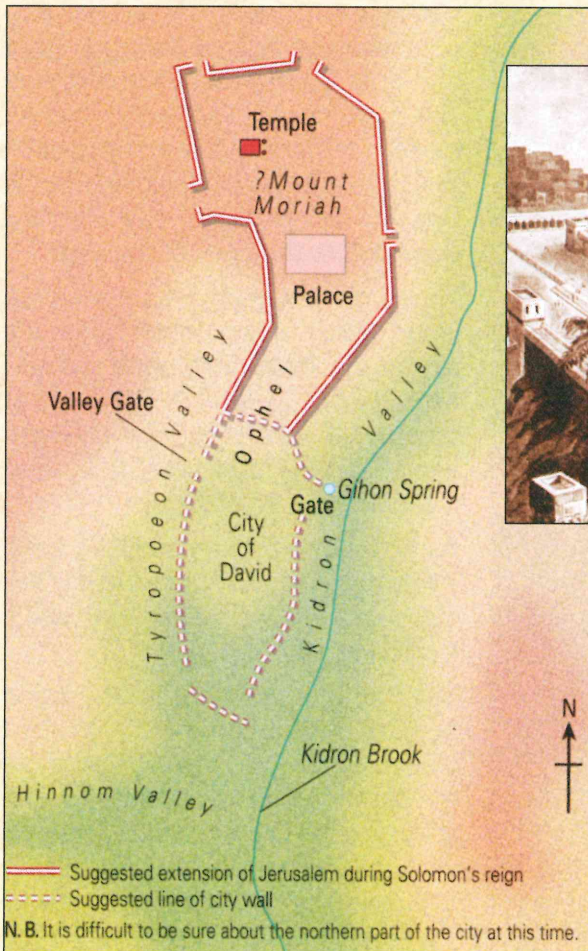
Solomon might have asked for anything: wealth, power, or even revenge on his enemies. Instead, he asked only for the wisdom to govern the people God had set him over as king.



God answered Solomon, "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked long life, but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may rule my people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like." (2 Chr 1:11-12)

God would give Solomon the wisdom he asked for, and also all the good things he didn't ask for. He would be legendary for his wealth and power, but more than anything else he would be the symbol of wisdom for all the ages.

Jerusalem In The Time Of David And Solomon, ca. 1010-930 B.C.



The Temple Mount, (the location of Araunah's Threshing-floor purchased by David and used by Solomon as the site of the Temple), appears to have been north of the original Zion. It is traditionally associated with Mount Moriah. The Moriah of David's day is the central portion of the eastern hill. The term Zion, initially used to describe the Jebusite fortress to the south, came to be applied to the Temple Mount as well.

Ophel is the name given to the southern extremity of the Temple Mount. South of Ophel was the original Jebusite city of Mount Zion.

Imperial Israel

Solomon's kingdom was an international empire. David's military success had enlarged the borders of Israel considerably, and Solomon's reputation for wisdom and wealth would draw visitors and traders from many nations. "Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy."¹

The new power and wealth of Israel quickly caught the attention of its powerful neighbors.

Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. (1 Kgs 3:1)

Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter is almost unique in Egyptian history. Other nations sent their sons and daughters to the court of Pharaoh, but Pharaoh never sent his daughters to a foreign court. Probably Egypt expected Israel to be a great new power, and wanted to share part of the power. Solomon was showing every sign of being an ambitious empire-builder. If a new empire arose between Egypt and Assyria, it would be vitally important for Pharaoh to make sure that the new power was allied with Egypt, not with Assyria.



But Pharaoh's daughter was far from the only marriage alliance Solomon made. We also read that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Those are symbolically perfect numbers. They show that Solomon had intermarried with all the nations, that he had in some way extended his dominion to the ends of the earth.

However, polygamy—even on such a grand scale—never comes without a penalty in the Bible. Solomon's harem might have been a symbol of his glory and international stature, but the foreign wives would also lead him away from God who had given him all that glory.

As Solomon's reputation grew, Israel sent traders all over the known world. Solomon also built a substantial navy and made Israel a sea power.

But the international contact that would be most remembered was the visit of the Queen of Sheba. From a faraway land in the south, a land of legendary wealth and splendor, the Queen of Sheba came to see

if Solomon was really as wise as people said he was. She probably also had a trading alliance in mind. We read that "she came to test him with hard questions." Asking riddles was a common game among royalty in the Near East, and no one could beat Solomon's answers.

She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king which he could not explain to her. (1 Kgs 10: 2-3)

Solomon's United Kingdom, ca. 970 B.C.



Solomon was heir to an empire formed largely through the leadership of his father David. Solomon reorganized the kingdom into twelve provinces (1 Kings 4: 7-19).

Solomon is said to have ruled from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt (1 Kings 4: 21). The Aramaean states as well as Edom and Moab regularly presented tribute to Solomon at Jerusalem.

Solomon's control of Zobah, Damascus, Ammon, Moab and Edom gave him a monopoly of the caravan routes between Arabia and the North.

Solomon's harem of a thousand wives and concubines represented alliances sealed by a marriage (1 Kings 11:1-8).



The Wisdom Of Solomon



The visit of the Queen of Sheba shows us the international invitation of the Davidic Covenant at work. Under Solomon, Israel had grown into a power that all the nations of the world had to reckon with. But the reason for the Davidic kingdom was not creating an earthly empire, but drawing all the world to Zion. Israel never became more than a small empire, but its religion spread to all the nations. Jerusalem never grew to be a great metropolis, but it gave hope to all the world.

It was the wisdom of Solomon that began drawing the nations to God. We see how it worked in the reaction of the Queen of Sheba:

And she said to the king, “The report was true which I heard in my own land of your affairs and of your wisdom, but I did not believe it until I came and my own eyes had seen it, and, behold, the half was not told me; your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report which I had. . . . Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel for ever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness.” (1 Kgs 10: 6-7, 9)

Solomon’s power and glory, but most of all his wisdom, led the pagan Queen of Sheba to praise the God of Israel. That was the ultimate purpose of the Davidic kingdom—not to give the people of Israel power and glory (which they didn’t deserve any more than we do), but to draw all peoples to God. “And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.”²

The wisdom of the Davidic kingdom was expressed in one of the four main classes of Old Testament literature: wisdom literature. Much of the wisdom literature in the Bible is attributed to Solomon; some of it was almost certainly written by him, and some was written by other wise people in the character of Solomon, who was the symbol of all wisdom. That wisdom literature would be the new law for all mankind that God had promised to David.

The book of Proverbs is a good example of wisdom literature. It consists of several collections of wise sayings, some of them Solomon's and some by other wise people—including the only whole chapter in the Bible identified as having a woman for its source material: Proverbs 31.

In Proverbs, scholars find some sections that resemble or even quote from the wisdom literature of other nations. Why would the divinely inspired Hebrew writers quote from the pagan authors of Egypt and Babylon?

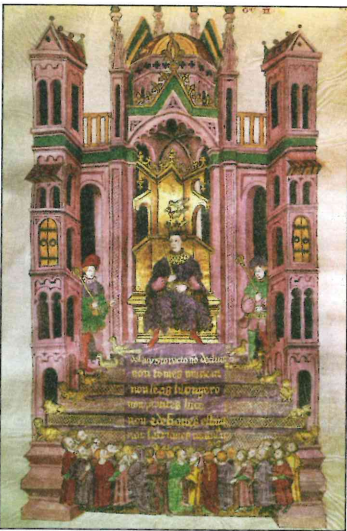
First, all wisdom is from God. A true believer never rejects wisdom, no matter where it is found.

But there is an important reason for quoting from the best literature of other nations. Wisdom literature is the new law—the new Torah—of the Davidic covenant. And the whole purpose of the Davidic kingdom is to draw all nations to God. Wisdom literature speaks to the nations in familiar terms, using some of the other nations' favorite proverbs to emphasize the truth that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prv 9:10).

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. (1 Kgs 4: 29-30)

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of Egypt and Babylon, but it was wisdom of the same kind. The wisdom literature of the Davidic kingdom was in the main stream of international philosophy. And because it spoke to the nations in familiar terms, it could lead the main stream of their thought into a new channel. Through their own wisdom traditions, it prepared them to receive the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

Solomon Builds the Temple



Of all Solomon's accomplishments, the one the people of Israel would most remember was the Temple. It was the architectural sign of their covenant with God, the place where God's glory dwelt among them.

David had prepared the way, buying the land for the Temple and providing for much of the Temple liturgy. But it was his son who would supervise the building itself.

Israel had grown suddenly glorious—so suddenly that there were no artists and craftsmen up to the task of building a structure as magnificent as the one Solomon imagined. So he turned to his father David's old friend King Hiram of Tyre, a king who also had a reputation for outstanding wisdom and glory. King Hiram sent materials and the skilled Phoenician craftsmen to work them. Thus the Temple of God, the center of the worship of Israel, was actually built by Gentiles.

It would also be a place of welcome for Gentile worshipers. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon prayed for his people Israel. But he also prayed for the people of the rest of the world.

Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of thy people Israel, comes from a far country for thy name's sake (for they shall hear of thy great name, and thy mighty hand, and of thy outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to thee; in order that all the peoples of the earth may know thy name and fear thee, as do thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name. (1 Kgs 8: 41-43)

Solomon's prayer is that the Temple will become "a house of prayer for all peoples," as a later prophet would say in Isaiah 56: 7.

The Temple of Jerusalem, the house of prayer that David wanted to build, will be the work of his son, Solomon. The prayer at the dedication of the Temple relies on God's promise and covenant, on the active presence of his name among his People, recalling his mighty deeds at the Exodus (1 Kgs 8: 10-61). The king lifts his hands toward heaven and begs the LORD, on his own behalf, on behalf of the entire people, and of the generations yet to come, for the forgiveness of their sins and for their daily needs, so that the nations may know that He is the only God and that the heart of his people may belong wholly and entirely to him. (CCC 2580)

Ancient traditions tell us more of what the people of Israel believed about their Temple. Solomon built the house of God on a rock, an enormous rocky outcropping outside the City of David. The rock was so immense that local legend said it was the gate of Sheol, the underworld—what the Greeks would call Hades. According to that tradition, Solomon's temple sealed off the underworld, and the gates of Hades could not prevail against it.

Tradition also says that the Temple was built on the very spot where Abraham prepared to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

When the building was finally finished, Solomon assembled all the leaders of Israel and had the priests bring the Ark of the Covenant from the tent to the Temple.

And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. (1 Kgs 8: 10-11)



A model of Herod's Temple started in 19 B.C. and completed in 62 A.D. Scholars believe that Herod followed the exact dimensions and instructions for building and furnishing the Temple given to Solomon by the Lord in 1 Kings 6-7.

Building Materials for Solomon's Temple



Cutting down the Cedars of Lebanon

"And so I purpose to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD said to David my father, ... Now therefore command that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me; ..." (1 Kgs 5: 5-6)

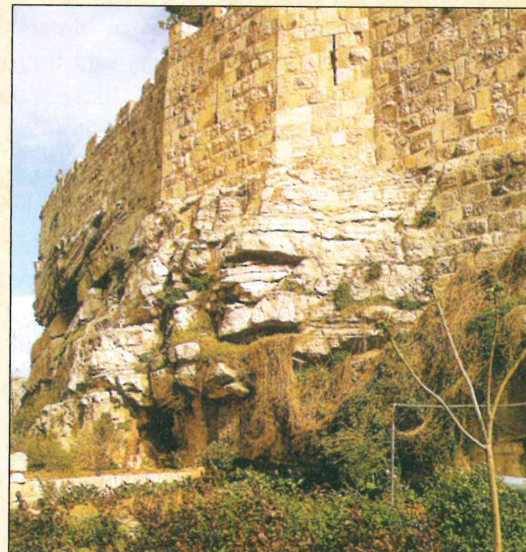


Today, the last of the Cedars of Lebanon are protected and cherished as a link with the Old Testament and ancient civilizations. The wood was the finest in the Middle East and used by many nations for buildings and sailing vessels. It had an elegant dark-red color, a sweet fragrance, and a durability that made it an ideal building material.

Solomon bought these beautiful trees from King Hiram of Tyre. Ten thousand men were sent to cut the trees and transport them to the sea where they were floated to the port of Joppa, then dragged to Jerusalem to be cut into pillars, beams and wood panels.

Stone for the building probably came from what is known today as King Solomon's Quarry, a deep cavern beneath the Old City of Jerusalem. It extends for hundreds of meters below the surface of the city in the direction of the Temple Mount. The type of stone found in the cave is a white limestone locally known as melech, or "royal" stone.

Because of the cavern's depth, the sound of tools would not have been heard at the construction site of King Solomon's Temple, on the Temple Mount. "When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry; so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple, while it was being built." (1 Kgs 6: 7)





Solomon's Pride And Apostasy

Solomon's glory was the talk of the world. But all that glory did not come without a price. It took crushing taxes to pay for Solomon's ambitious building projects, and tens of thousands of Israelites were forced into laboring for their king. People began to grumble that Solomon's glory was only making them miserable. Worse than that, it could even be called unconstitutional. Deuteronomy, the basic law of Israel's government, was very specific about what a king must not do:

**Only he must not multiply horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, "You shall never return that way again."
And he shall not multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply for himself silver and gold. (Dt 17: 16-17)**

Solomon's stables were the envy of the world; in fact, he lavished so much expense on caring for his horses that tour guides still point out the remains of Solomon's stables today. (Nothing remains of either his Temple or his palace.) With seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, Solomon could hardly deny that he had multiplied wives for himself. And Solomon's wealth was so legendary that even today the search for King Solomon's lost gold mines is a popular theme in novels and movies.

In fact, Solomon had become exactly the sort of King Samuel had predicted years before:

So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots;

and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your menservants and maidservants, and the best of your cattle and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; and they said, “No! but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.” (1 Sm 8:10-20)

But Solomon’s wives were the most unbearable burden. He had married many women from the surrounding nations, the nations God’s people had been warned to have nothing to do with.

For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. (1 Kgs 11:4-6)

Solomon’s wives persuaded him to build temples to their gods in the suburbs of Jerusalem. Instead of drawing the Gentiles to worship the True God, Solomon was drawing his own people to worship foreign gods. Israel would soon pay the price for Solomon’s weakness.

The Idol Gods Of Solomon’s Wives

Ashtoreth was the goddess of love and fertility. She was worshiped throughout Palestine and other countries. She is thought by some to be Athtar or Ishtar, a universal goddess named after the planet Venus.

Chemosh was the Moabite’s national god. Solomon built a shrine for Chemosh which was later destroyed by King Josiah. Chemosh was similar to Molech in attributes and the burnt offering of children.

Molech was the national god of the Ammonites. Children were also sacrificed in his worship.

“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. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.” (1 Kgs 11:7-8)



Molech the national god of Ammon

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*

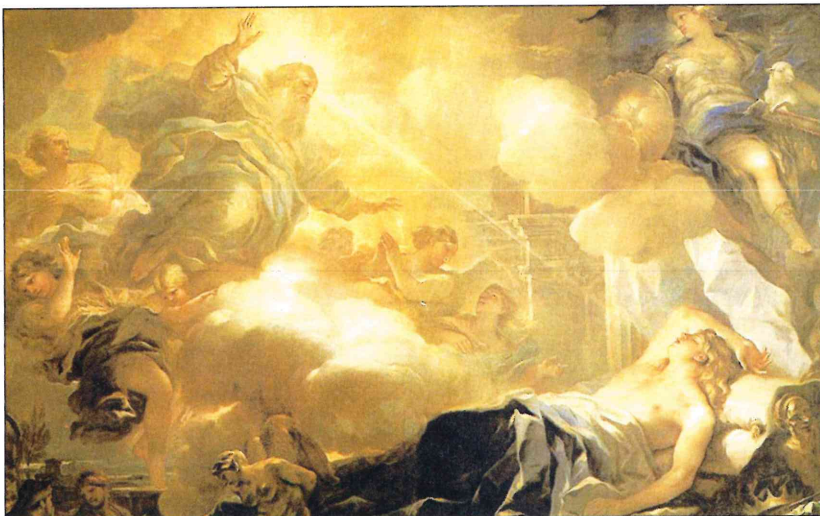
21. For the Old Testament, knowledge is not simply a matter of careful observation of the human being, of the world and of history, but supposes as well an indispensable link with faith and with what has been revealed. These are the challenges which the Chosen People had to confront and to which they had to respond. Pondering this as his situation, biblical man discovered that he could understand himself only as “being in relation”—with himself, with people, with the world and with God. This opening to the mystery, which came to him through Revelation, was for him, in the end, the source of true knowledge. It was this which allowed his reason to enter the realm of the infinite where an understanding for which until then he had not dared to hope became a possibility.

For the sacred author, the task of searching for the truth was not without the strain which comes once the limits of reason are reached. This is what we find, for example, when the Book of Proverbs notes the weariness which comes from the effort to understand the mysterious designs of God (cf. 30: 1-6). Yet, for all the toil involved, believers do not surrender. They can continue on their way to the truth because they are certain that God has created them “explorers” (cf. Eccl 1: 13), whose

mission it is to leave no stone unturned, though the temptation to doubt is always there. Leaning on God, they continue to reach out, always and everywhere, for all that is beautiful, good and true.

22. In the first chapter of his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul helps us to appreciate better the depth of insight of the Wisdom literature’s reflection. Developing a philosophical argument in popular language, the Apostle declares a profound truth: through all that is created the “eyes of the mind” can come to know God. Through the medium of creatures, God stirs in reason an intuition of his “power” and his “divinity” (cf. Rom 1: 20). This is to concede to human reason a capacity which seems almost to surpass its natural limitations. Not only is it not restricted to sensory knowledge, from the moment that it can reflect critically upon the data of the senses, but, by discoursing on the data provided by the senses, reason can reach the cause which lies at the origin of all perceptible reality. In philosophical terms, we could say that this important Pauline text affirms the human capacity for metaphysical enquiry.

According to the Apostle, it was part of the original plan of the creation that reason should without difficulty reach beyond the sensory data to the origin of all things: the Creator.



*“And Solomon said to God, ...
‘O Lord God, let thy promise
to David my father be now
fulfilled, for thou hast made
me king over a people as many
as the dust of the earth.’”
(2 Chr 1: 7-9)*

VOCABULARY

APOSTASY

Turning away from the true religion.

ASHTORETH

A pagan fertility goddess worshiped by Solomon in his later years.

GENTILE

A member of any of the nations outside Israel.

MILCOM

One of the many pagan gods worshiped by Solomon in his later years.

PAGAN

One who follows a false religion, worshipping many gods instead of the True God.

SHEBA, QUEEN OF

The queen of a wealthy country to the south. She came to Jerusalem to test Solomon's

wisdom, which led her to praise the God of Israel, demonstrating the kingdom's role in leading the nations to the True God.

SHEOL

The Hebrew name for the underworld.

SOLOMON

The son of David who inherited his kingdom and God's covenant. He led Israel to its greatest glory, and was famous for his wisdom.

TEMPLE

The house of God in Jerusalem, which contained the Ark of the Covenant. When the Temple was dedicated, God's glory overshadowed it just as it had done in the Tabernacle. The Temple became the center of worship for Israel.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What did Solomon choose when God offered him anything he wished for?
2. With what nation did Solomon make an important and unusual alliance by marriage?
3. How many wives did Solomon have?
4. How many concubines?
5. What did the number of Solomon's wives and concubines indicate?
6. How did Solomon draw other nations to God?
7. What was the ultimate purpose of the Davidic kingdom?
8. Give one reason why the book of Proverbs would contain quotes from other nations' writings.
9. Where did the craftsmen who built the Temple come from?
10. At the dedication of the Temple, who did Solomon pray for?
11. Who was allowed to worship in the Temple?
12. According to legend, what did Solomon's temple accomplish?
13. What did tradition believe about the rock under Solomon's temple?
14. Into what sin did Solomon's wives lead him?
15. Whose prophecy did King Solomon fulfill?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. When God asked Solomon what he wanted from him, all Solomon requested was wisdom enough to rule God's people. In return for his unselfishness, God granted him wisdom and promised him wealth and power beyond any of the other kings of Israel. How did Solomon's wisdom and power bring others to God? How did this spreading of the faith help to fulfill the Davidic covenant? What does God expect us to do with the talents he has given us?
2. Why is it significant that the craftsmen who built the Temple came from a nation outside the chosen people? What does that fact help to reveal about God's purpose for the Temple in the Davidic covenant?

3. Solomon's wealth and power, though they had been instrumental in bringing many different people to God, ended up leading him into sin and idolatry. His many wives convinced him to build pagan temples and ended up turning his heart away from God. Solomon gives us an example of both the great good and the great evil that can come from wealth and power. How would a spirit of poverty have helped Solomon as he wielded his power as king? What are some ways in which we can limit ourselves in earthly possessions? How might this help us stay more focused on God?



The Judgment of Solomon

"Then the king answered and said, 'Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means slay it; she is its mother.'" (1 Kgs 3: 27)

Endnotes

1. 1 Kgs 4: 20.
2. 1 Kgs 11: 24.