

Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem



1 Kings 8:27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built (said Solomon)! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God . . . that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' . . . Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place."

King Solomon is probably best known for having built the first Jewish Temple in the great City of Jerusalem, and this feat is being celebrated in the readings today from the First Book of Kings, which is perhaps the climax of the Old Testament readings for the last 14 weeks, with their stories of Samuel, and Saul, and David, and now Solomon. Previously, the Ark of the

Covenant, which contained the original tablets of the 10 Commandments, was carried about in a tent, as a sacred relic of the tribes of Israel. Good King David, however, after conquering the City of Jerusalem, and establishing it as a neutral location for the capital of his new monarchy, brought the Tent of Meeting into Jerusalem for the first time, and as you heard earlier, he wanted himself to build a house there for God, a temple, but instead God promised to make a perpetual 'house' of David and his lineage. Thus, in the year 960 B.C.E. David's son, Solomon, barring no expense, built a great and holy Temple to house the Ark of the Covenant permanently in City of David.

For the prosperity of King David's reign had expanded in King Solomon's time, whose kingdom now stretched from the Euphrates in the north to Egypt in the south, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, the largest boundaries that the people of Israel have ever known, and the Temple which Solomon constructed reflected the glory that was the nation of Israel at that time. Solomon's reputation was so great that in a brief, unelaborated, and enigmatic passage, the Bible describes how the fame of Solomon's wisdom and wealth spread so far and so wide that the queen of Sheba decided that she must meet him, who came bearing a number of gifts including gold and rare jewels. Thus, the Temple, this magnificent building brought renown upon

Solomon's Kingdom, but which was also probably the cause of the nation's ultimate demise.

As I am sure you all remember, back in June, at the beginning of this long cycle of readings this summer about the great Kings of Israel, the elders of Israel gathered together and came to the prophet Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the LORD, and the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them . . . forsaking me and serving other gods. . . Now then, listen . . . you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

So, Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. He said to them, "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 . . . 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 courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your

vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-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."

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, "No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles." So Samuel anointed Saul as their king.

In Deuteronomy 17, the Lord commands the kings of Israel not to multiply their horses, their wives, or their gold. Solomon appears to have multiplied all three. First, Solomon collected from his subjects 666 talents of gold each year, we are told, an enormous amount of money for a small nation like Israel; he became wealthy at the expense of his own people. Secondly, Solomon, we are told, gathered 12,000 horses and horsemen and 14,000 chariots, and had to build special cities to house them all. Finally, according to 1 Kings 11:3 Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, with many of these wives described as foreign princesses, including the Pharaoh's daughter and women of Moab, Ammon, Sidon, and the

Hittites, who we are told turned to their husband Solomon to build for them temples to their foreign gods, which he did.

But worse than that perhaps, is that in order to build the Temple in Jerusalem, that we are celebrating in today's reading, Solomon found it necessary to use slave labor, not only from the nations that bordered his country, but also from amongst his own people. Solomon enslaved his own people in order to secure the workers to build his Holy Temple and other projects like his own new palace, which took 13 years to build, or the new city wall, or a palace for the daughter of Pharaoh (who was one of his wives) or facilities for the horses and chariots and for the foreign traders. As a result of Solomon enslaving his own people, and placing heavy taxation on them, they not surprisingly became embittered, particularly as he granted special privileges to his own tribe of Judah, which alienated the northern tribes.

And so upon Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam became king. Jeroboam, the man who was in charge of Solomon's forced laborers, feared that Rehoboam would continue to tax the people too heavily - as his father Solomon had done. So, Jeroboam and others promised their loyalty to Solomon's son only in return for lesser burdens, and for lower taxes. The older advisors to the King counseled Rehoboam to agree to this, but the King sought advice from the younger people with whom he had grown up;

and they advised him to tax the people even more. So, Rehoboam proclaimed to the people, "Whereas my father (Solomon) laid upon you a heavy yoke, so shall I add tenfold thereto. Whereas my father tortured you with whips, so shall I torture you with scorpions. For my littlest finger is thicker than my father's loins; and your backs, which bent like reeds at my father's touch, shall break like straws at my own touch." Absolute power corrupts absolutely and thus in response, Jeroboam and the people angrily rebelled against the King; and the ten northern tribes broke away from the favored tribe of Judah and formed a separate kingdom, the Northern Kingdom of Israel as opposed to Rehoboam's Southern Kingdom of Judah.

And so, Israel and Judah were in a state of constant civil war throughout Rehoboam's seventeen-year reign. Alas, the 12 tribes of Jacob were never united again as one people; and divided, the tribes of the sons of Jacob soon fell prey to their enemies. For the next two hundred years each Kingdom had periodic wars with their neighbors. United they stood, but divided they fell. Thus in the first months of 721 B.C.E., after a three-month siege, Samaria, the capital city of the north, fell to the great Assyrian Empire, who's King then deported more than 27,000 Israelites into the region of Persia, where they were dispersed forever. And with that, the Northern Kingdom was

no more, and the ten northern tribes of Israel were lost forever.

One hundred and thirty-five years later, the mighty Babylonian Empire after a long siege broke through the walls of Jerusalem, and utterly laid waste that great City of David, destroying Solomon's Holy Temple, stone by stone, carting away its treasures, and deporting the last survivors of the Southern Kingdom to exile in Babylon.

So then, was Solomon the greatest and wisest King of Israel, ruling over the largest territory, having the most fame and wealth, building the most memorable monuments, or was Solomon with his overbearing taxation of his subjects, and his enslaving of his own people, and his lusting after way too much wealth, and horses, and women, the very cause which divided the United Kingdom of Israel forever?