

7

Solomon's Splendor

I Kings 9:10—10:29; II Chronicles 8:1—9:28

a Solomon Fortifies Israel (I Kings 9:10-19)

[Solomon] built up Lower Beth Horon, Baalath, and Tadmor in the desert, within his land, as well as all his store cities and the towns for his chariots and for his horses.

—I Kings 9:17b, 18a

Solomon's building campaigns had begun in the fourth year of his reign and continued for 20 years (vs. 10; see 6:1). The 24th year of Solomon's reign was probably 946 B.C.

Solomon had agreed to pay Hiram king of Tyre an annual stipend of wheat and olive oil in exchange for all the lumber needed for the temple and palace (see 5:10, 11). At some point in the process, Hiram also provided Solomon with 120 talents (about four and one-half tons) of gold in addition to the cedar and pine timber (9:11, 14). In exchange Solomon gave Hiram 20 towns in a western part of the territory of Asher, which bordered Phoenicia.

When Hiram got around to inspecting these Galilean villages, he thought them inadequate compensation for his gold (vss. 12, 13). Hiram complained to Solomon and nicknamed the area Cabul, meaning "borderline" or "good for nothing," a joke about their location and their quality. Apparently Solomon took the Cabul villages back and either gave Hiram something better or repaid his gold from a replenished treasury (see II Chron. 8:2).

At this point, the Chronicler included mention of Solomon's one military campaign to secure the northern borders of Israel. He conquered Hamath, a city in modern Lebanon to the north of Syrian Damascus and adjacent to the Israelite territory of Zobah (see II Chron. 8:3). He built outposts around Hamath and fortified Tadmor, a caravan city between Damascus and Haran in Mesopotamia (see vs. 4; I Kings 9:18).

Solomon then launched a campaign to fortify Israel against future military threats. He relied on the forced labor of enslaved non-Israelite residents of Palestine (vs. 15). "The supporting terrace"



even during times of relative peace and prosperity.

Ask Yourself . . . *What are some weak spots in my spiritual armor that need strengthening?*

Next, Solomon built up certain cities as fortresses to guard key caravan junctures and mountain passes. Archaeological finds suggest that Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer were his primary fortifications. Hazor, north of the Sea of Galilee, guarded the juncture of two caravan routes from the north. Megiddo guarded the best pass across the Carmel ridge linking the plain of Sharon to the south and the Jezreel Valley to the north. All coastal traffic used this pass. Gezer protected the highway from Joppa, Israel's only Mediterranean port, to Jerusalem in the interior. Pharaoh had destroyed the Canaanite fortress at Gezer and given the ruined town to his daughter as a wedding gift when she married Solomon (vs. 16).

Secondary fortifications were built at Upper and Lower Beth Horon (vs. 17; see II Chron. 8:5).

The Aijalon Valley was a steep, narrow passage that the road from Joppa to Jerusalem passed through after it passed Gezer. Lower Beth Horon was at the bottom of the ascent and Upper Beth Horon at the top. Solomon fortified both, but Lower Beth Horon was the more important of the two. Baalath in the old tribal territory of Dan (see Josh. 19:44) guarded another western

translates the Hebrew term *millō*, which was probably a series of terraces to fill in the saddle between the two hilltops and link the City of David with the new temple-palace complex. The city defenses also expanded to encircle the supporting terraces, the palace, and the temple.

Spiritually speaking, it is good to keep on strengthening ourselves,

approach to Jerusalem (I Kings 9:18). In addition, Solomon developed supply depots and stables for chariotry throughout Israel in numerous unnamed locations (vs. 19).

b **Solomon Organizes Israel (I Kings 9:20-28)**

Solomon did not make slaves of any of the Israelites; they were his fighting men, his government officials, his officers, his captains, and the commanders of his chariots and charioteers. —I Kings 9:22

Solomon organized various aspects of the national life of Israel: public works, temple worship, and commercial shipping. These projects took advantage of his God-given wisdom and represented high points in the history of Israel.

Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites were tribal groups found in Canaan (vs. 20). All were Canaanites, except the Hittite settlers, who were native to Asia Minor. When the Israelites had invaded Canaan under Joshua, they had been commanded by God to exterminate all the Canaanite tribes (see Deut. 7:1-6). Many Canaanite enclaves had survived four centuries of Israelite dominance. Initially they had fought for survival (I Kings 9:21). Eventually they just coexisted with Israel. Solomon used historic

precedent to impress thousands of resident aliens as slave laborers in public-works building projects (see Deut. 29:11; Josh. 9:22, 23).

The king did not conscript Israelites as forced laborers. He employed them in the army, in the bureaucracy of government, and as the ranking officers in his corps of chariot warriors. He also employed 550 Israelites as the project supervisors of the building projects employing the Canaanite workers. Solomon's construction of the terraces between the old city and the temple area occurred after his palace was completed and his Egyptian queen had moved to her new quarters (I Kings 9:22-24).

Solomon set an example for the nation of Israel by worshiping solely at the temple where God had chosen to place His name and reveal His glory cloud (vs. 25). Previously Solomon had worshiped at the high place, but after the temple was erected, he observed the three major festivals there each year: the Feast of Unleavened Bread just after Passover in the spring, the Feast of Weeks in the summer, and the Feast of Tabernacles just after the day of Atonement in the fall (see Exod. 23:14-17).

The Chronicler noted that Solomon also observed daily, weekly, and monthly sacrifices at the temple as prescribed by the law (see II Chron. 8:13). Solomon's interest in establishing the temple as the exclusive focus of Israelite worship certainly extended to more than the three major annual festivals.

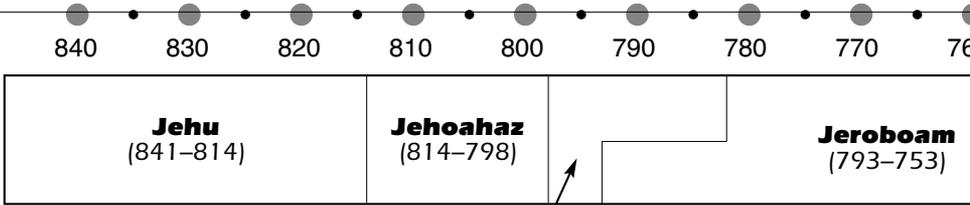
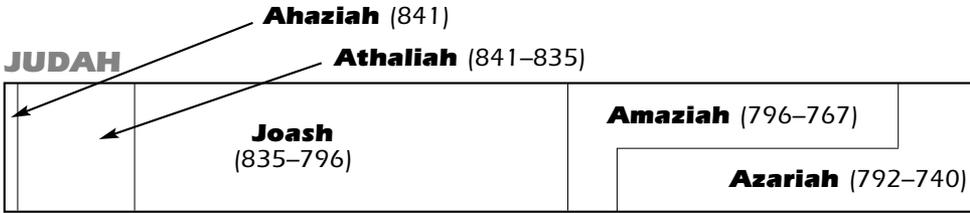
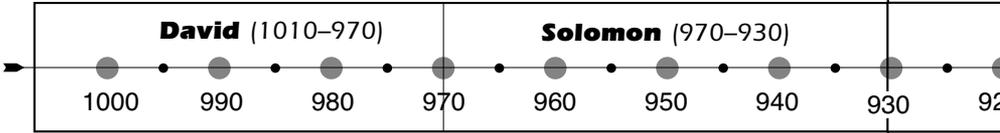
The Kings of King

JUDAH

Rehob
(930-9)

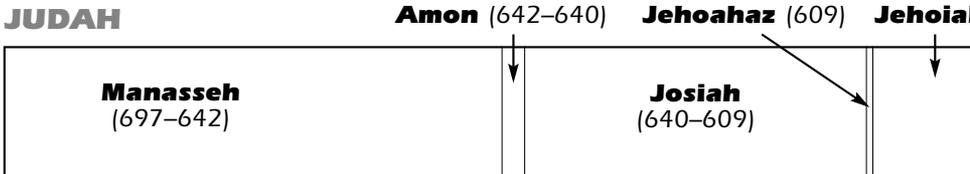
Jerol
(930)

ISRAEL



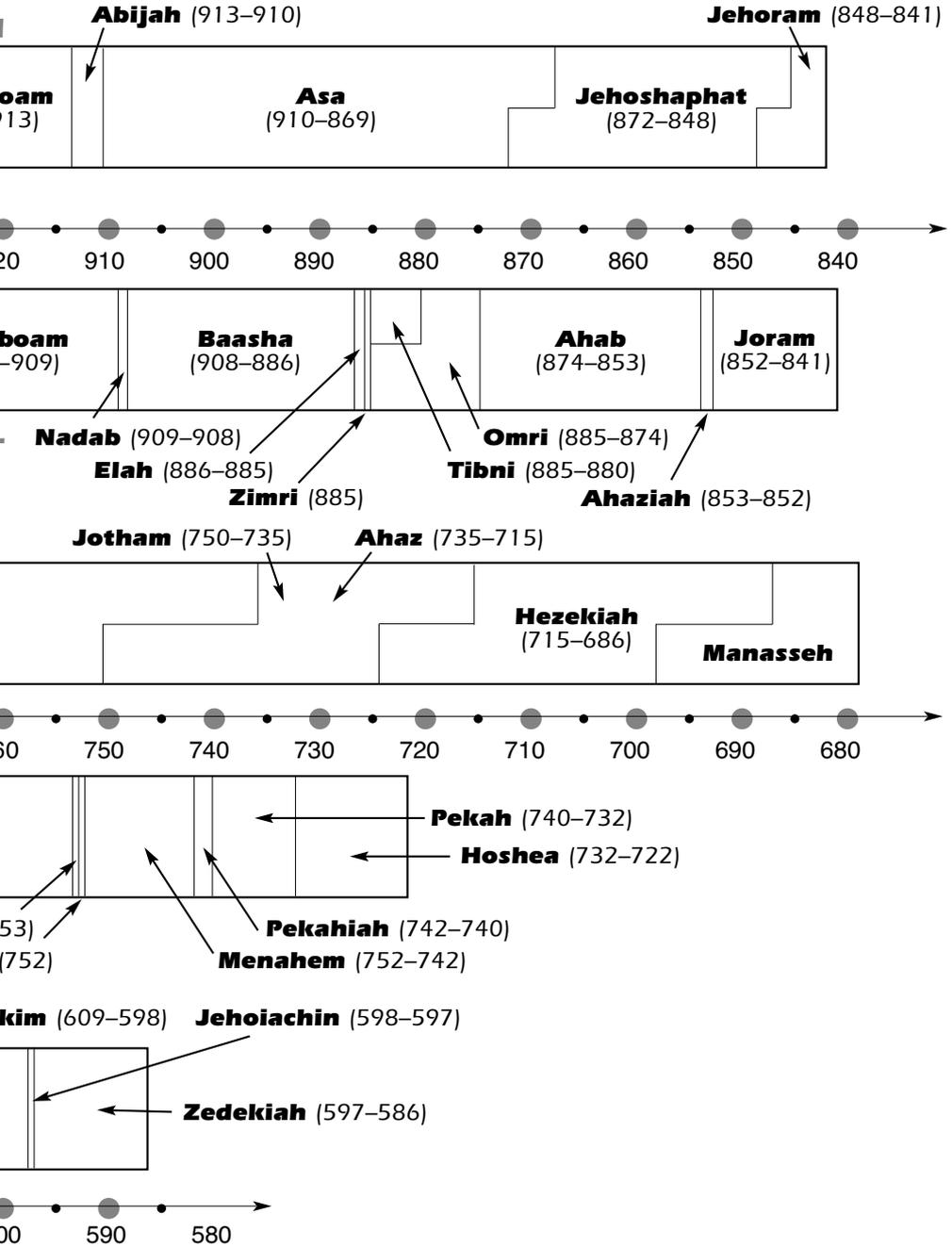
ISRAEL

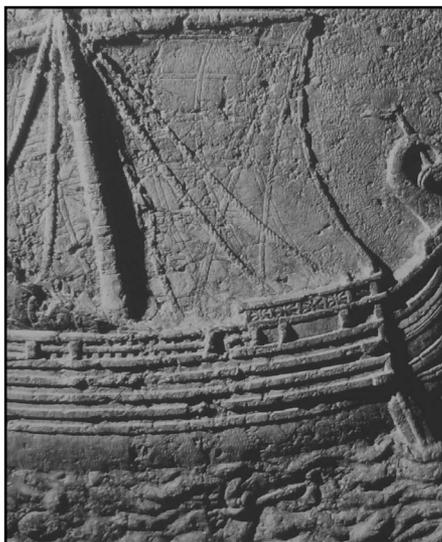
Zechariah (7
Shallum (



JUDAH

gs and Chronicles





A relief of an eighth-century b.c. ship. Solomon's ships probably looked like this.

(see II Chron. 8:18), which probably means he sent the lumber and plans.

Phoenician crews commanded and manned the fleet along with Israelite sailors-in-training. Their destination was the mysterious Ophir, where the fleet would take on a cargo of 420 talents, or about 16 tons, of gold (I Kings 9:27, 28). Scholars differ widely about the location of Ophir. The Somali coast of Africa; Supara, north of modern Bombay in India; and various locations in southern Arabia are the most frequent suggestions. The distance must have been significant since a voyage took three years (see 10:22).

C Solomon Impresses Foreign Royalty (I Kings 10:1-13)

No matter how busy we may be, worship should always be given highest priority.

Ask Yourself . . . *Is there anything in my life that takes priority over worship?*

The Israelites had never been seafarers, but when Solomon's kingdom reached south to the arm of the Red Sea (known today as the Gulf of Aqaba), he recognized the opportunity to organize profitable international commerce. At Ezion Geber near Elath (the modern resort city of Elat), Solomon built a fleet of large merchant ships (I Kings 9:26). The Chronicler said that Hiram sent these ships to Solomon

"I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard."

—I Kings 10:7

Assyrian records reveal a number of queens ruling Arabian tribes, so it probably was not surprising to the Israelite court that Sheba's head of state was a powerful woman skilled in diplomatic language and driven by curiosity and intelligence. Some scholars focus on imagined economic motives behind the queen's visit

to Solomon, but the stated reasons are that she had heard that his fame derived from “his relationship to the LORD” (vs. 1) and she wanted to put the king’s storied wisdom to the test.

The queen of Sheba brought Solomon a camel-caravan load of gold, spices, and precious stones (vs. 2). The spices—associated with perfumes and ointments rather than food—were the most impressive and valued part of her gift (vs. 10).

Her personal mission was posing “hard questions” to Solomon (vs. 1). Arabian literature features obscure riddles and enigmas about life’s mysteries designed to stimulate deep thought. The queen probably pressed the most puzzling philosophical and religious issues of the day on Solomon to compare his answers with those she had heard from the sages of her court.

No vexing issue the queen of Sheba asked Solomon about stumped him (vs. 3). Not only did he answer every difficult question, but the quality of his answers surpassed anything she had ever heard. They rang true at the deepest spiritual levels. The queen was overwhelmed by the cumulative effect of Solomon’s personal wisdom, the splendor of his capital city, the opulence of his court, and the majesty of his worship of God (vss. 4, 5). Likewise, our relationship with God can have a significant impact on unbelievers. We might be surprised to find out that some non-Christians are watching us to see how we make decisions and establish priorities.

The queen—partly as diplomatic courtesy, but largely as honest confession—confirmed that the dramatic stories she had heard about Solomon were true. She had been

Sheba and the Sabeans

Sheba was a kingdom in southeastern Arabia, occupying part of modern Yemen and controlling territory in eastern Ethiopia across the Bab el Mandeb, the narrow straits between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Its capital, Marib, has been excavated by archaeologists.

Sheba flourished as the receiver of merchandise from India and Africa that it shipped by camel caravan to Damascus and Gaza. Spices, especially Arabian balm, were Sheba’s specialty. Solomon’s commercial fleet operating from Ezion Geber probably posed some threat to Sheba’s long-standing empire.

The Hebrew “sh” sound equaled a south Arabic “s,” so the residents of Sheba are known in world history as the Sabeans.

unable to believe them without personally checking their veracity. After doing so she concluded that words couldn't convey half of the impact of witnessing his wisdom. She praised Solomon's officials, who benefited every day from working in the presence and atmosphere created by his wisdom. She praised the Lord (whom she identified as Solomon's God) and credited Him for Solomon's unusual abilities and magnificent realm (vss. 6-9). She attributed the justice and righteousness of Solomon's government to the Lord's love for His people Israel.

The queen of Sheba gave Solomon 120 talents of gold, the same amount Hiram king of Tyre had given him in exchange for the 20 towns of Cabul (vs. 10; see 9:11). Perhaps Solomon used this gold to repay Hiram when he was dissatisfied with the towns (see I Kings 9:13; II Chron. 8:2).

Ask Yourself . . . *Who is the wisest person I know? What would I ask him or her if given the opportunity?*

The spices in the gift from Sheba stood out because Solomon's shipping venture with Hiram had already netted him great quantities of gold, precious stones, and rare woods. The rare woods went into special applications in the temple and palace and into musical instruments (I Kings 10:11, 12).

In addition to sharing his wisdom with her, King Solomon lavished gifts on the queen of Sheba in keeping with his stature as a wealthy and powerful king (vs. 13). The

Chronicler indicated that the value of Solomon's gifts exceeded that of hers (see II Chron. 9:12). Romantic Jewish tradition says that Solomon married Sheba and had a son by her. The imperial family of Ethiopia claims descent from that son. The legend has neither explicit biblical nor historical support.

d **Solomon Multiplies Israel's Wealth (I Kings 10:14-29)**

The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. —I Kings 10:27

The annual revenue of Solomon's kingdom was 666 talents of gold, or about 25 tons of the precious metal (vs. 14). Beyond that predictable income, he also collected duties from caravans passing through Israel, fees from nomadic sheiks of Arabia, and income from the governors of the districts of Israel (vs. 15; see 4:7-19).

Solomon used some of his vast store of gold to cover decorative shields for his royal residence, the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon (10:16, 17). The wooden frame of each large shield, such as a foot soldier would hide behind, was covered with about seven and one-half pounds of gold. Each small shield, such as an archer would sling on his arm, required

half as much gold, roughly three and three-quarter pounds.

Ask Yourself . . . *If I suddenly had the wealth of Solomon, what would happen to my walk with God?*

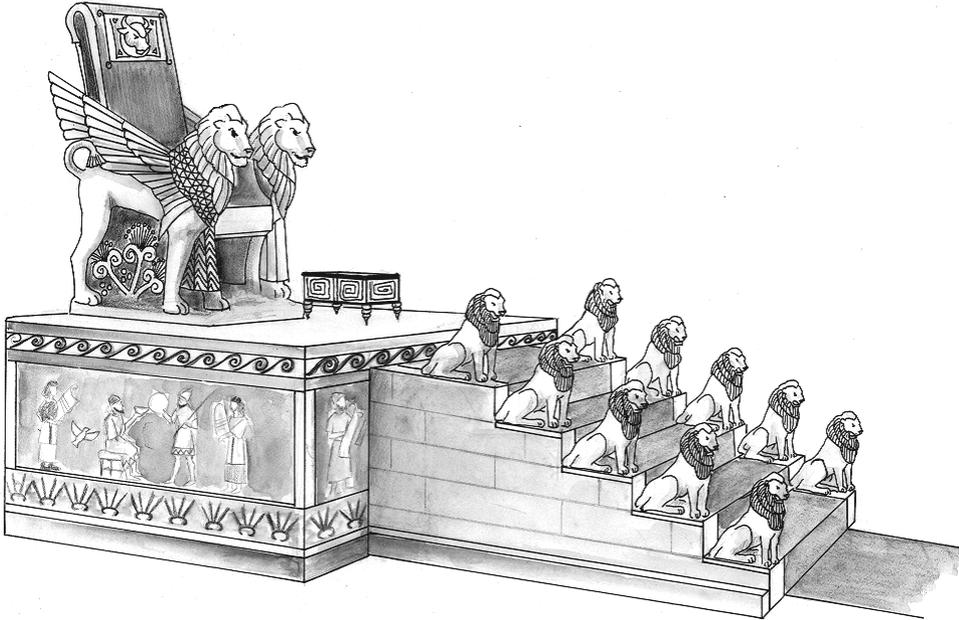
Pharaoh Shishak carried all these shields off to Egypt as plunder in the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, fewer than 30 years after Solomon had them made (see 14:25, 26). The splendor of Israel's monarchy truly did depend on the obedience of its kings to the law of God.

Much more impressive than the shields was the throne Solomon made for his palace (10:18). The

nature of the rounded top of the back of Solomon's throne (vs. 19) may be clarified by the back of the throne of Airam king of Byblos as depicted on his sarcophagus. The back of his throne folded over so that a cross-section looked like an inverted letter U.

The statues of lions by the armrests and on either side of each step suggested Solomon's regal power and nobility (vs. 20). The avenue ascending the stairs between the lions also focused attention on the king. Solomon's wealth was so great that all his dinner service and household utensils were solid gold (vs. 21).

An artist's representation of Solomon's throne



Silver was too common to have any value (vss. 22, 27). Every three years Solomon's commercial fleet brought another infusion of precious and exotic cargo. If Ophir was in either Africa or India, Solomon's cargo would be of native origin. If Ophir was in Arabia, the cargo had probably originated elsewhere and was resold to Solomon.

No one in the world of his day approached Solomon in wealth or wisdom; consequently the whole world sought him out to question him and honor him with the finest gifts representing their homelands (vss. 23-25).

Out of his vast resources, Solomon accumulated a powerful force of chariotry, which may have begun with horses and mules given him as gifts (vss. 25, 26). The chariot force was distributed among Jerusalem and various other strategic defensive points throughout Israel (see 9:18).

His interest in horses led Solomon to make Israel a commercial intermediary in the trade in horses and chariots between Egypt in the south and Syria (Aram), Cilicia (Kue), and the Hittite areas in the north. Solomon bought horses and chariots from various sources north and

south. He sold primarily to the Hittites in Asia Minor and to his northern neighbors the Syrians (10:28, 29).

II Chronicles 8:1—9:28 in Brief

Once again the Chronicler included unique material from Solomon's career that involved worship. Solomon kept his Egyptian bride away from David's palace because the holy ark had been there. Solomon strengthened the hold of the temple on popular worship by instituting David's plans for divisions of priests, for the organization of Levites as singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants, and for establishing temple treasuries.

The Chronicler noted that the queen of Sheba acknowledged that Solomon sat on God's throne and ruled for Him over Israel. He also noted that at the peak of Solomon's splendor he ruled over territory stretching from the Euphrates River to the border of Egypt. The Chronicler used words that implied God had fulfilled His promise to Abraham about the dimensions of the promised land (see Gen. 15:18).