

5

Solomon Builds the Temple

I Kings 5—7; II Chronicles 2:1—5:1

a Solomon Orders Building Materials (I Kings 5:1-6)

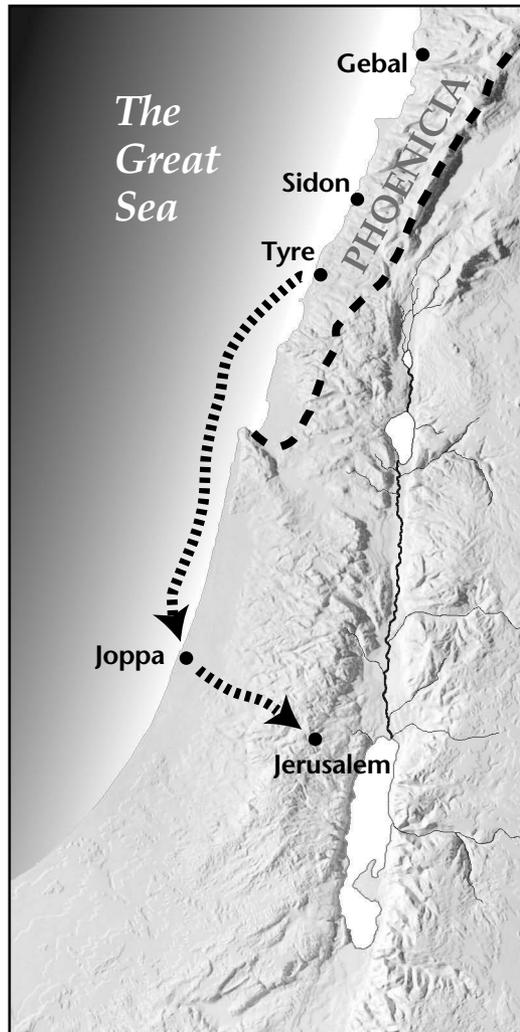
“Give orders that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me. My men will work with yours, and I will pay you for your men whatever wages you set. You know that we have no one so skilled in felling timber as the Sidonians.” —I Kings 5:6

David did more than just provide materials for Solomon to use in building the temple. Solomon’s father had also forged political alliances that would make for a peaceful environment in which to construct God’s house. One of these political alliances was with the influential king of Tyre in Phoenicia, Hiram.

The territory known as Phoenicia

The coastal plain of the Phoenicians was suited to shipping, and the famous cedars of the interior comprised one of their chief exports. This is the route Hiram’s cedar would have taken to get to Jerusalem.

extended north from Mount Carmel along the Mediterranean coast to include important port cities such



as Tyre, Sidon, and Gebal. The Bible tends to call this the land of the Sidonians (vs. 6) after the oldest major city, but Tyre and its king were the real power there during David and Solomon's time.

Hiram, king of Tyre, reigned from about 978 to 944 B.C. He may also have served a lengthy co-regency with his father during some of the time he was David's ally. Hiram had provided materials to David when he built his palace in Jerusalem (see II Sam. 5:11). He and David had established friendly relations between Israel and Tyre that lasted until the Babylonians destroyed both nations. Hiram had officially recognized Solomon's government as soon as David's son was inaugurated (I Kings 5:1), even as he had been the first to recognize David's rule in Jerusalem over all Israel.

As Christians we, too, should be quick to acknowledge and respect those to whom God has given special authority and skills.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who could I give special honor to this week?*

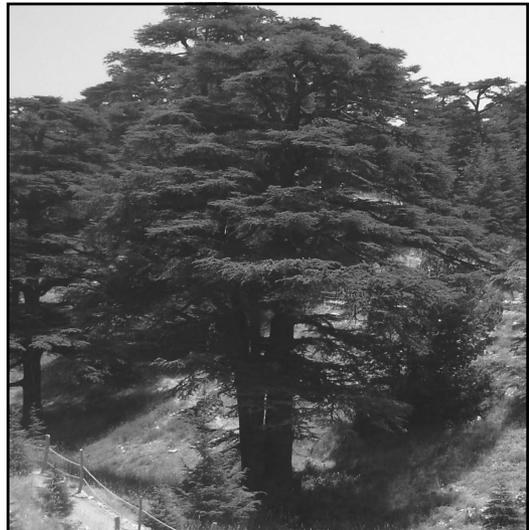
Solomon responded to Hiram's envoys with an appeal for assistance in building a temple to the Lord. Solomon did not go into full detail with the pagan king about why David's warfare had kept him from building the temple. But he did not hesitate to bear witness that the temple would be in honor of the glory and character of the Lord, who fought for His covenant people and their king. In fact, he stressed to Hiram that it was the peace God had provided that

made building the temple possible during his reign (vss. 2-4).

As a result of this divinely aided peace, Solomon pledged himself to build a temple for the Lord's name (vs. 5). He envisioned his action as the outworking of one of the promises God had made to his father (see II Sam. 7:12, 13).

What Solomon wanted from Hiram was the lumber necessary for the temple. The famous cedars of Lebanon resisted rot and insect infestation. They made the most beautiful and the most durable lumber of the ancient Middle East. Palaces and temples from Egypt to Babylon boasted timbers from the Lebanese mountains under the control of Tyre.

Solomon readily admitted that his workmen were inferior lumberjacks to the seasoned timbermen of Phoenicia (I Kings 5:6). He volunteered workers to fell and ship logs, but he put them under Sidonian supervisors. Solomon wouldn't even haggle over wages. Hiram's loggers were the best, so he was willing to pay whatever the king of Tyre asked.



That willingness says volumes about the cordial nature of Hiram and David's friendship that Solomon now benefited from.

b The Temple Materials Are Delivered (I Kings 5:7-12)

"My men will haul them down from Lebanon to the Mediterranean Sea, and I will float them as rafts by sea to the place you specify. There I will separate them and you can take them away."

—I Kings 5:9ab

Nothing in the Old Testament or ancient historical records suggests that Hiram king of Tyre was anything other than a pagan. His pious response to Solomon contained phrases praising God and crediting Him with Solomon's ascension to David's throne (vs. 7). But ancient diplomats often used the language, religion, and customs of the nation addressed as a courtesy. In later days, Assyrian diplomats used Israelite metaphors to describe Egypt

(see II Kings 18:25). The Persian emperor Cyrus would express his decree concerning the Jews and Jerusalem in language that could have been written by an Israelite prophet (see II Chron. 36:23).

Hiram's business sense as king of a commercial nation shows in the contractual wording of his memo to Solomon (I Kings 5:8, 9). He agreed to provide all the cedar and pine logs Solomon wanted. The exact identification of the wood called pine is uncertain. It was used as flooring in the temple (see 6:15). Some interpreters think this was a type of fir. Others call it a variety of juniper known to have grown in Lebanon.

Hiram agreed to cut and rough-trim the timber, move the logs to the Mediterranean coast, lash the logs into rafts, float them south to Joppa, and then break up the rafts so the logs would be ready to move (5:9, 10; see II Chron. 2:16). From Joppa the cedar and pine logs were Solomon's responsibility. In return for them Solomon was to provide food for Hiram's court.

The Phoenician seacoast was rugged and mountainous, forested with the finest trees in the Middle East, and dotted with good ports suitable for shipping all over the

The famous cedars of Lebanon. Solomon used Lebanese cedars in the construction of the temple. The cedars that covered the mountains of Lebanon in thick forests were evergreens that grew to heights of 100 feet and had trunk circumferences of 30 to 40 feet. Branches grew only near the top, so the dark-red, fragrant cedar logs were knot-free. Overtimbering by the Ottoman Turks has left only a few protected groves as a reminder of the once vast forests.

Annual payment to Hiram's workers

Each symbol represents 1000 bushels or gallons



This diagram represents an annual payment by Solomon to the workers of Hiram.

construction while Hiram sent timber (see 6:37, 38) or whether it went on throughout Solomon's reign. If Solomon supported Hiram's court for 36 years, it would help explain why Israel felt economically exhausted at the time of Solomon's death (see 12:4).

Ask Yourself . . . *What tasks has God prepared for me that will probably require an exhausting effort?*

In addition to the annual payments Solomon made to Hiram, he was obligated to pay the lumbermen. Second Chronicles 2:10 lists the one-time payment to the workers as about 125,000 bushels of flour, 125,000 bushels of barley, 115,000 gallons of wine, and 115,000 gallons of olive oil. With all of the logistical details of arranging

for the lumber and paying for it, it's no wonder that construction did not begin until the fourth year of Solomon's reign. This was no small undertaking.

But Solomon would succeed because the Lord had given him unusual wisdom to reign justly and prudently (I Kings 5:12). He maintained the harmonious relations with Hiram that David had

Mediterranean basin. But Phoenicia didn't have enough arable land to feed itself. Israel seems to have become Phoenicia's breadbasket. On an annual basis, Solomon sent roughly 125,000 bushels of wheat and 115,000 gallons of olive oil to Hiram (I Kings 5:11).

The biblical text doesn't indicate whether this payment lasted only during the seven years of the temple

established and solidified them with a formal peace treaty between Israel and the Phoenician city-states.

If we tap into God's wisdom as Solomon did, we also can learn creative ways to maintain harmonious relationships and thus be freed to accomplish great things for God.

C Solomon Recruits Builders (I Kings 5:13-18)

Solomon had seventy thousand carriers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hills, as well as thirty-three hundred foremen who supervised the project and directed the workers. —I Kings 5:15, 16

Solomon told Hiram king of Tyre that he would send workmen to assist the Sidonian timbermen. Accordingly, Solomon conscripted 30,000 Israelite men and divided them into three work crews of 10,000 each (vss. 13, 14). Each crew spent one month in the forests of the Lebanese mountains and then two months at home in Israel working their own fields. Thus each man spent four months of the year working for King Solomon and eight months supporting his family. Israelites accepted that foreigners in their midst should be forced to work for the state, but they never liked the policy of virtually enslaving Israelites (see 12:4). This, however, was part of what Samuel

had warned Israel about when the people first asked to have a king (see I Sam. 8:10-18).

Ask Yourself . . . When was the last time I got what I bargained for and regretted it?

A man named Adoniram [ad-oh-NEYE-rahm] supervised the drafting of workers, their organization into work parties, their movements back and forth to Lebanon, their feeding and housing, and their labor in the forests (I Kings 5:14; see 4:6). David had promoted Adoniram to this position (see II Sam. 20:24), and he served in it all through the 40 years of Solomon's reign. He was assassinated as the first violent act of revolt against Solomon's son Rehoboam (see I Kings 12:18).

In addition to the 30,000 Israelite workers in the forest of Lebanon, Solomon conscripted 150,000 non-Israelites living in Israel to quarry building stones and transport them to Jerusalem (5:15-17; see II Chron. 2:17, 18). Of these, 80,000 cut the limestone building blocks from the hills around Jerusalem, and 70,000 transported the massive blocks of stone to the temple site atop Mount Moriah. Thirty-three hundred non-Israelites served as foremen for this massive quarrying activity. Another 550 Israelite officials coordinated the foremen on behalf of Adoniram (see I Kings 9:23).

The craftsmen of Hiram king of Tyre and of Solomon—both native Israelites and resident aliens—were assisted by “men of Gebal” [GHÉE-bal] (5:18), residents of Byblos in



Stone of **STRENGTH**

The stone used to build Solomon's temple was probably limestone. The pinkish-white limestone of Israel is soft when first quarried so it can be cut with a saw and polished to a fine finish (1 Kings 7:9). After exposure to the elements, however, the limestone hardens to the toughness needed for a durable building material.

An ancient quarry under old Jerusalem is traditionally called Solomon's quarries and might have been the source of much of the temple stone. If the stone blocks for the temple foundation were comparable to those of Solomon's palace, they ranged in length from 12 to 15 feet and weighed several tons apiece.

northern Phoenicia. The men of Gebal must have practiced a specialized wood or stonecraft that the original readers would have known about. Later in the Greek era, Gebal produced so much paper from Egyptian papyrus that *byblos* became the Greek term for book. The word survives in our word *Bible*.

d The Temple Is Constructed (1 Kings 6:1-13)

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.
—1 Kings 6:1

First Kings 6:1 is one of the most important chronological references in the Bible. By synchronizing biblical and Assyrian records, historians date the fourth year of Solomon's reign as 966 B.C. Starting from that known date, the exodus from Egypt would have been 480 years earlier in 1446 B.C. Many biblical scholars, however, treat the number 480 in 1 Kings 6:1 as representative of 12 generations (12 x 40) and argue for a much later Exodus (about 1290 B.C.) on archaeological grounds.

The month of Ziv in Israel's lunar calendar, when the temple construction began, corresponds roughly

to late April and early May in our solar calendar. The major feasts of Passover and Firstfruits on the 14th and 21st of the preceding month (see Lev. 23:4-14) would have prepared Israel spiritually for laying the physical foundation of the temple. Before we begin any task for God, we should prepare our hearts for whatever He wants to accomplish through us.

The general shape and floor plan of Solomon's temple apparently followed those of the tabernacle, but the dimensions were doubled (I Kings 6:2). The tabernacle dimensions can be calculated from the combined width of the wall components in Exodus 26:15-25. It is assumed that the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle was a cube 10 cubits on a side since the one in Solomon's temple was a cube 20 cubits on a side (see I Kings 6:20).

The ancient cubit was about 18 inches in length, so Solomon's temple was about 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet tall (vs. 2). Since the Holy of Holies at the rear of the temple was only 30 feet in height (see vs. 20), there may have been a second-story chamber occupying the 15 feet above it. A 15-foot-deep entrance porch stretched across the width of the east end of the temple (vs. 3). It rose 30 feet, 15 feet lower than the roofline.

Narrow windows let light into the upper reaches of the temple. Below the windows three stories of side rooms ran along the lower part of the temple's outer walls. Each story of storerooms was wider than the

one below because the temple walls receded a cubit at the level of each higher story to create the ledge on which support beams rested without penetrating the wall (vss. 4-6).

All of the building stones were cut and shaped to specification at the quarries so that no unnecessary harsh sounds of metal tools were heard on the temple site (vs. 7). In some way, each block must have been marked at the quarry so the builders on site knew where it went according to their set of building plans. This made for efficient construction and showed respect for the sacredness of the temple site.

The storerooms were entered from the south side of the temple, and a system of stairways accessed the other two levels from there. There also must have been interior passages and doorways that aren't mentioned. The flat roofs were constructed of planks over cedar support timbers. Cedar timbers also supported the stories of storerooms on the ledges built into the exterior walls of the sanctuary proper.

While the building progressed, the Lord sent a message to Solomon (vs. 11). This "word of the LORD" may have been delivered by a prophet, because I Kings 9:2 identifies a later visit from the Lord to Solomon as the second direct revelation to him, comparable to the one at Gibeon (see 3:5). The Lord identified His message as one about the temple (6:12), but He proceeded to speak about Solomon's obedience to the law as a prerequisite for

enjoying the blessings of the promises He had made to David. Only then could the Lord promise to live among His people Israel in the temple Solomon was building (vs. 13).

Ask Yourself . . . *What kind of heritage will I pass along?*

**I Kings 6:14—7:51;
II Chronicles 2:1—5:1 in Brief**

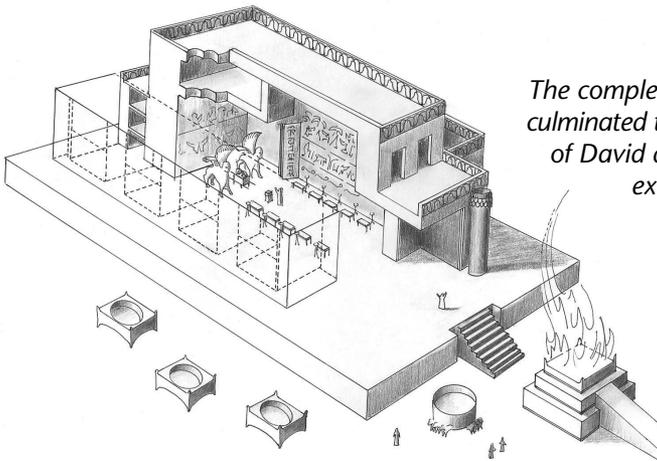
Solomon paneled the interior of the temple with cedarwood carved with gourds, flowers, palm trees, and cherubim. The walls and floors were overlaid with gold.

The Holy of Holies was separated from the holy place by means of ornate olivewood doors, heavy embroidered curtains, and gold chains. Solomon put pine doors in the main entryway from the porch into the holy place. A wall of three courses of stones topped by cedar logs bounded the inner courtyard

around the temple. An identical wall eventually enclosed Solomon's palace and the temple in a great outer courtyard.

A master craftsman from Tyre named Hiram (Hiram-Abi in II Chronicles) oversaw the production of an immense bronze altar, two massive bronze pillars that stood before the temple, the bronze "Sea" that rested on the hindquarters of 12 bronze bulls, and a variety of other bronze items that he cast in earthen molds dug in the clay soil of the Jordan valley near Succoth and Zarethan. Hiram also made the altars, tables, lampstands, and other items for the temple made of gold.

After the temple was finished Solomon built his complex of palaces. They took nearly twice as long to build because they were larger and no advance planning had been carried out. By the 20th year of his reign—roughly the midpoint of his rule—Solomon rested from his building projects.



The completion of Solomon's temple culminated the dreams and ambitions of David and his son to honor and exalt the name of the Lord.