





Solomon's wealth allowed him to import treasures from around the world. "Once every three years the ships of Tarshish would arrive bearing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks (1 Kings 10:22, HCSB).

Right: Tyre, a Phoenician coastal city and home to a major seaport, was vitally involved with Israel in international commerce. King Hiram of Tyre formed a mutually beneficial trade alliance with both David and Solomon. Shown, a Phoenician jug found at Tyre.

# Solomon in All His Splendor

BY LEBRON MATTHEWS

**T**HE CORONATION of Solomon marked a milestone in the history of Israel. For the first time sovereignty over all twelve tribes was passed peacefully at the death of the king. It would never happen again.

## The Kingdom He Inherited

Solomon's ascension to the throne had no basis other than he was God's choice to rule the kingdom. His older brother, Adonijah, had the natural right from a human perspective, and Adonijah enjoyed the support of powerful government officials. Solomon himself made no attempt to secure the throne until he had been anointed king by Zadok the priest. His supporters acted out of the conviction they were doing God's will. And the peaceful acceptance of his authority by the population surely was the result of a similar belief.

Saul, Israel's first king, was killed in battle against the Philistines. When news of his death reached the southern tribe of Judah, they anointed the tribe's favorite son, David, as king. When David invited other tribes to acknowledge him as king, they refused. Israel's leading general, Abner, installed Saul's surviving son, Ish-bosheth, as king over the northern tribes. David established his capital in the ancient city of Hebron. Ish-bosheth seems to have maintained his capital at Mahanaim in Gilead. Over the next two years Israel was ravaged by bitter civil war. David grew stronger while Ish-bosheth became weaker. David's success was due in part to military victories and in part to Ish-bosheth's incompetence. In the end, Ish-bosheth's army transferred its loyalty to David and Ish-bosheth was assassinated.

With the civil war over, David attacked the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. After its fall he transferred his capital there. Since the city had no connection with either side during the civil war, both sides accepted Jerusalem as a political sign that David would reign over a unified kingdom. David's reign, however, was marked by revolt and scandal internally and by constant warfare with Israel's neighbors. Yet despite the strife, David succeeded in providing his kingdom with stability and national identity.

As David grew old, the kingdom faced a crisis. The only precedent for transmission of royal power was civil war, a possibility no one wanted. Yet David's successor was either not clear or was not universally accepted. The threat of violence loomed over the horizon. Political intrigue abounded. Although people were familiar with David's preference of Solomon, a conspiracy developed to install Adonijah as king. The conspirators included Joab (commander of the army), Shimei (a relative of King Saul), and Abiathar (high priest). Queen Bathsheba proved to be more than adequate in thwarting Solomon's opponents. She persuaded David to instate her son Solomon as his heir. We must be careful not to minimize Yahweh's role in Solomon's rise. Ultimately, God—and God alone—determined who would be king of

Israel. Bathsheba and her allies were instruments of His divine will.

In the ancient world bloody purges were common aftermaths of a new king's coronation. To consolidate power, a new monarch frequently eliminated potential rivals, including members of the royal family. After David's death, Solomon also eliminated potential troublemakers. His purge was instigated by his brother's foolish maneuvering. Adonijah, as David's oldest surviving son, considered himself to be the heir apparent. Solomon's coronation failed to weaken Adonijah's desire to become king. After his father's death, Adonijah requested that the new king give him Abishag as a wife. Abishag had been David's last concubine. Adonijah's request was an inept move to reassert his claim to the throne. Although Solomon had previously granted him clemency, Adonijah was executed for this new scheme.

Before his death, David commanded Solomon to kill Joab and Shimei. Joab had been ruthless and violent in his support of David. But he murdered Abner after Abner made peace with David. And he killed Absalom despite orders from David to spare him. David had been ineffective in dealing with Joab's brutality, perhaps because of Joab's insight into the Bathsheba incident.

When Bathsheba became pregnant as a result of David's adultery, David plotted to hide his guilt by killing her husband. Joab carried the king's orders into battle with him, orders that would guarantee the death of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite. Therefore Joab's death was punishment for his crimes.

Shimei had also been David's



## LESSON REFERENCE

BSFL: 1 Kings 3:1-28

enemy. Rather than follow his father's orders to kill Shimei, however, Solomon granted Shimei clemency. He was allowed to live if he stayed confined to the city of Jerusalem. He did live in Jerusalem—until he violated the terms of his reprieve three years later.

Another potential enemy of Solomon, Abiathar, also was allowed to live. He was banished to Anathoth. Abiathar had been high priest during David's reign and was part of the conspiracy to make Adonijah king. Despite its obvious political benefits, his removal from office fulfilled the prophetic condemnation of Eli's family (1 Sam. 2:27-36). The elimination of these powerful men consolidated Solomon's authority and enabled him to govern initially without significant opposition.

### The Kingdom He Built

In the steps Solomon took to secure his throne, he demonstrated wisdom and leadership. His order to put Adonijah to death was neither vindictive nor unwarranted. It followed clear evidence that his half-brother still entertained hope of becoming king. The deaths of Joab and Shimei reflected Solomon's willingness to listen to the advice of others. His

father had instructed him to execute both men. The banishment of Abiathar revealed respect for God's servants, even when they failed to measure up to the appropriate standard. Furthermore it demonstrated that at this point in his life, Solomon's judgment conformed to God's word. In each case, he acted decisively and judiciously.

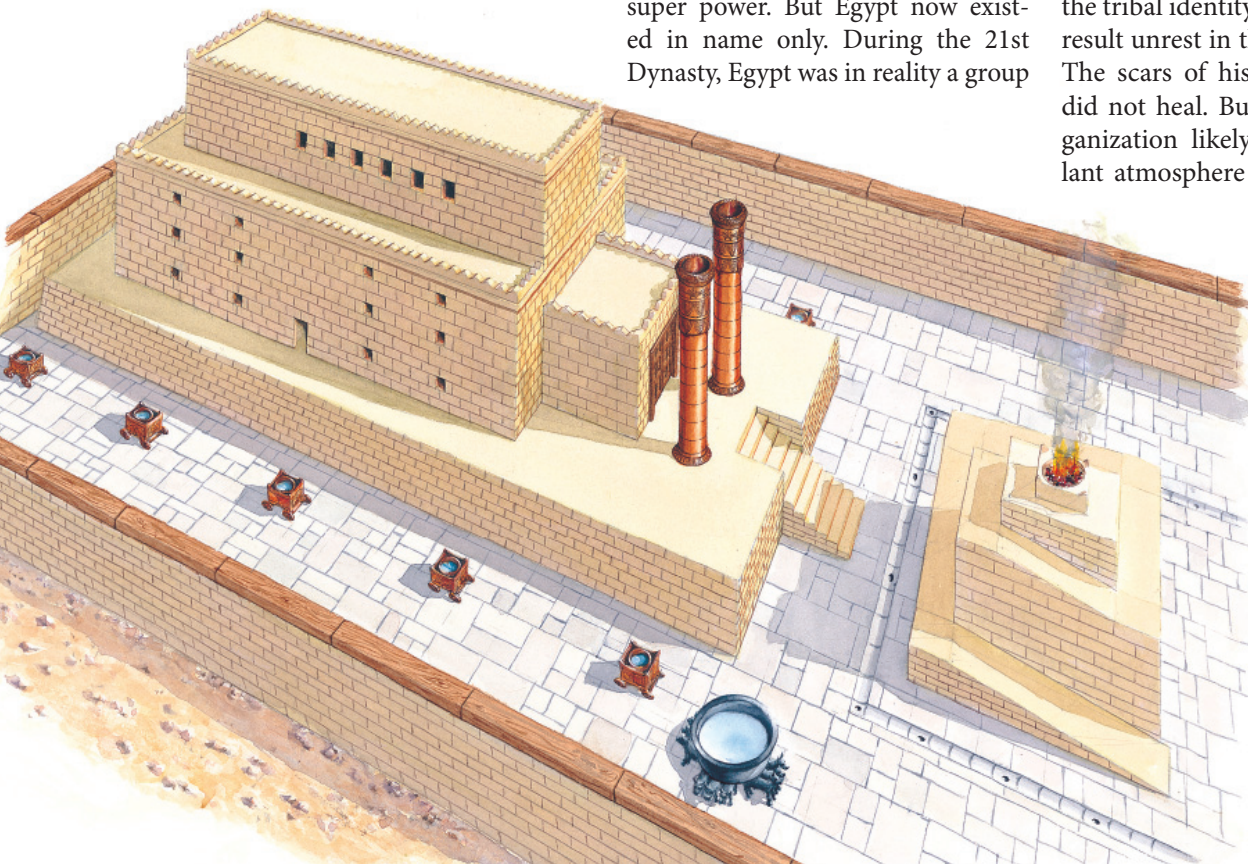
Early in Solomon's reign God appeared to him. Solomon demonstrated his astuteness by requesting that God grant him wisdom. Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge. The new king acknowledged that his rise to power was the consequence of Yahweh's activity, not his own merit. Furthermore, at this stage in his life, Solomon felt totally inadequate for the task before him. If he was to succeed in ruling Israel, he would need God's guidance. Only God could enable him to rightly apply the knowledge he possessed. He demonstrated the zenith of this wisdom in discerning the true mother of the infant brought to him by two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28).

Solomon cemented an alliance with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. The union may have seemed impressive—historically Egypt had been the world's great super power. But Egypt now existed in name only. During the 21st Dynasty, Egypt was in reality a group

of independent states held together by trade and title.<sup>1</sup>

The true significance of Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess was the political recognition it provided. The loose confederation of Israelite tribes that David had forged into a tenuous kingdom had become a political state equal to its neighbors, including mythical Egypt. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Only a generation earlier, the stability of Israel was threatened. A victorious Philistine coalition had defeated Israel's army and occupied considerable territory west of the Jordan River. Under Solomon, the entire region between the Sinai Peninsular in the south and Syria in the north and between the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Arabian Desert to the east was under Israel's control. The marriage to an Egyptian princess signified international respect for Solomon's power and prestige.

In ancient Israel, people commonly identified themselves by their tribal affiliation. Solomon reorganized his kingdom into political units called districts rather than maintaining the old tribal confederation. While the move was politically expedient, it ultimately weakened the unity of the nation by removing the tribal identity of its citizens. As a result unrest in the tribes increased. The scars of his father's civil wars did not heal. But initially the reorganization likely produced a jubilant atmosphere of fresh hope that



**Left: Artist's rendition of Solomon's temple. The temple had three main sections: the porch or portico, the main hall or holy place, and the inner sanctuary—or the most holy place or "holy of holies." Much of the temple interior and furnishings—including floors, walls, pillars, cherubim, and the altar—Solomon covered with gold.**

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is common to political change and innovation. Its bureaucracy established the image of a strong and efficient administration.

Solomon aggressively pursued public works projects such as construction of his palace and Yahweh's temple. The infrastructure of Israel improved. Public buildings provided an object of national pride. The temple would serve as the heart of Israel's religion for centuries.

Solomon established further foreign political alliances, especially with Hiram of Tyre. These alliances resulted in peaceful relations with Israel's neighbors. Peace benefitted both the economy and the society. The vast building projects produced trade with Israel's neighbors. The Phoenician city-state of Tyre provided Israel with world renowned cedar lumber. But its contribution was not limited to the raw material. Its expert craftsmen in wood and ivory were among the world's best and were contracted for work in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Phoenicians were seafaring traders who provided access to a larger world market.<sup>2</sup> Archaeological evidence suggests that Phoenician merchants set up business throughout Israel. They were joined by merchants from Arabia who brought spices, incense, and gold overland.<sup>3</sup> However, Israel's role in international trade at this time seems mainly to have been in importation, as little evidence exists that they shipped large quantities of materials outside the kingdom.

Unfortunately political alliances often were cemented through marriage. Solomon began to acquire the harem of an oriental despot. He erected temples just outside Jerusalem where his wives could worship their native gods the same as in their pagan homelands. Many citizens obviously considered their presence as evidence of the king's progressive spirit.

The early years of the reign of Solomon were known as Israel's "Golden Age." It was a time of peace

## SOLOMONIC GATES



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: G.B. HOWELL, JR.

**Above: Solomonic gate at Gezer.**



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: BOB SCHATZ (1971/9)

**Right: Solomonic gate and case-mate walls at Tel Hazor.**

**Below: Solomonic gate leading into Megiddo. The section below the horizontal board is original; above, reconstructed.**



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: G.B. HOWELL, JR. (85/172)

and prosperity. Cultural achievements expanded. The king gained a reputation for his proverbs. In part this was due to his patronage of wisdom literature and his establishing schools to educate Israel's adolescent boys. Formal education and literary progress produced works such as those recorded in the biblical Books of Proverbs and Song of Songs.

To the elderly especially, the transformation of Israel must have seemed phenomenal. To the young, it signified Israel's rightful place in the world.

Solomon, "in all his splendor," was a ruler worthy of their allegiance. **B**

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2. Glenn E. Markoe, *The Phoenicians, Peoples of the Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 33-35, 94, 129; D. R. Ap-Thomas, "The Phoenicians," *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 273-281.

3. B. S. J. Isserlin, *The Israelites* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 185-187.

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