

Solomon

D. F. Payne

Contents

I Early Life	1
Parents and Birth	1
Name	2
Adonijah's Conspiracy	2
II. Achievements	2
Biblical Record	2
Political Alliances	2
Military Measures	3
Administrative Measures	3
Trade and Industry	3
The Temple	3
Other Buildings	4
Wisdom	4
III. Failings	4
Bibliography	5

From the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

Solomon. Son of David and third king of Israel.

I Early Life

Parents and Birth

Solomon was David's eighth son. Six sons — all of different mothers — were born at Hebron before David's capture of Jerusalem. When he had established his capital and court there, David fell in

love with a married woman, Bathsheba, and committed adultery with her, a son being born of the union. Meanwhile David arranged the death of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, and made her his wife (2 S. 11:2–5, 14–17, 26f). The firstborn of David and Bathsheba died within a week (12:15–18); their second child was Solomon (v 24). Solomon was thus David's son by his favorite wife; that is presumably why David chose Solomon to succeed him, rather than the older sons born at Hebron.

Name

According to 2 S. 12:24f, Solomon was given two names at birth. The first, Solomon, by which he is invariably known in the Bible, was given to him by his parents. The root meaning of the word is “peace,” but it may be connected with the name of the capital, Jerusalem. The other name, Jedidiah, “loved of Yahweh,” was given to him by the prophet Nathan. Other Hebrew kings had more than one name (e.g., Zedekiah, also called Mattaniah; cf. 2 K. 24:17); possibly Solomon was a throne-name and Jedidiah a personal name.

Adonijah’s Conspiracy

Although Solomon was David’s chosen heir to the throne, his eldest surviving brother, Adonijah, saw no reason why he himself should not become king. Thus when it became clear that David was dying, Adonijah sought to establish his own position, and gained the support of Joab the army commander and Abiathar the priest (1 K. 1:7). The conspirators left the city and held a banquet at En-rogel, at which no doubt Adonijah was proclaimed king.

In his rival’s absence Solomon acted swiftly. His mother Bathsheba and another influential figure at court, Nathan, went to David, reminded him of his long-standing promise to Solomon, and persuaded him to act (1 K. 1:11–37). The aged king’s favor proved decisive, for he was able to furnish Solomon with more effective backing than that possessed by Adonijah. Zadok the priest was not inferior to Abiathar, and Benaiah had the military advantage over Joab in that his men — the king’s personal troops — were ready and at hand.

Solomon took his supporters to Gihon, near Adonijah’s convocation at En-rogel (1 K. 1:9, 38), and there he was crowned king of Israel. He was anointed by priest (Zadok) and prophet (Nathan) and was surrounded by the royal bodyguard, who acclaimed him David’s successor (vv 32–40). The trumpet was sounded, and the festivity was such that Adonijah could not fail to be aware that some unusual ceremony was taking place. When the explanation reached him, his conspiracy at once fell to pieces, the conspirators departing hastily for the safety of their homes (vv 41–53). Thus Solomon became king shortly before his father’s death.

Solomon showed himself ruthless as he consolidated his own position. Adonijah pleaded for his life, but Solomon would make no promises (1 K. 1:51f). As

soon as Adonijah showed the first signs of further ambition, the king had him killed (2:13–25; *see* Abishag). Joab scarcely outlived Adonijah; he too was struck down before he could endanger Solomon (vv 28–34). This execution had been suggested by David himself (vv 5f); Solomon was swift to comply. Abiathar was deposed and confined to his estate (vv 26f). An ancient foe of David, Shimei, was similarly put under house arrest (vv 36f); as soon as he left Jerusalem, he was pursued and killed (vv 39–46). Benaiah, who acted as executioner in these cases, was given Joab’s position as commander-in-chief; Zadok became high priest without a rival, taking over Abiathar’s duties and functions. “So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (v 46).

II. Achievements

Biblical Record

Solomon’s reign is described in 1 K. 1–11 and 2 Ch. 1–9. Relatively few details are given, however; both accounts dwell on the building of the temple and its attendant circumstances. It is not easy, therefore, to assess the character either of Solomon or of his reign. He is credited with great piety, but his apostasy does not go unremarked; his wisdom is proverbial, but his folly was responsible for the disintegration of his realm after his death; the surface peace and prosperity barely veiled considerable oppression and unrest. Since Solomon’s reign was long, one may conclude that his character, ability, and farsightedness and the state’s economic security and political strength were impaired gradually, perhaps imperceptibly.

Political Alliances

Having consolidated his own position, Solomon immediately took steps to consolidate the kingdom. Further conquest was unnecessary; he had only to strengthen his frontiers. He first sealed an alliance with Egypt, marrying Pharaoh’s daughter (1 K. 3:1). This alliance even brought him a small increase in territory (9:16). His northern neighbor, Hiram I of Tyre, had been David’s ally, and Solomon renewed this bond (5:12). Their treaty proved of greater commercial than military importance (see II. E below); but unfortunately Solomon relied commercially on Hiram to such an extent

that he could not repay him in kind and was eventually forced to cede twenty Galilean cities to him (9:10f).

Military Measures

Besides forming these very shrewd alliances, Solomon made sure that his empire would be safe in the event of war. A series of cities throughout his territory was fortified and given permanent garrisons (1 K. 9:15–19); of these Jerusalem itself, Hazor (*see* picture in Kings, Books of), and Megiddo are notable. This fortification process was a new step militarily. It involved the novel features of a standing army and the employment of chariots especially on a large scale (10:26).

Administrative Measures

Israel had changed radically since the days of Saul, and it is no wonder that Solomon felt the need to implement a number of administrative changes. Moreover, his heavy expenditure necessitated heavy taxation, and his grandiose schemes demanded some forced labor (or *corvée*), both of which required efficient administration. The old tribal divisions had lapsed, especially since the Canaanite cities had been incorporated into Israel; thus the land was redivided into twelve administrative districts, with an officer appointed over each (1 K. 4:7–19). Solomon made several other new appointments, as a comparison of 2 S. 20:23–26 (David's officials) with 1 K. 4:1–6 shows.

Trade and Industry

Solomon was competent as a diplomat, strategist, and administrator but showed exceptional perspicacity in his commercial enterprises. To secure a sound economy, he utilized Israel's own resources to the full and took complete advantage of its geographical position astride the trade routes of the ancient world. For example, 1 K. 10:28f describes a very lucrative royal venture. His import requirements of horses and chariots led Solomon to realize that he controlled the trade routes from Egypt, which manufactured chariots, and Cilicia ("Kue"; the RSV is to be preferred in v 28), famed for its horses. Solomon by acting as middleman could make his own profit from these Egyptian and Cilician exports.

The narrative about the Queen of Sheba emphasizes Solomon's wisdom, and the story has often been called a legend (1 K. 10:1–13). But the context indicates that her visit to Solomon was really connected with trade and as such is intelligible; its historicity need not be doubted. In the ancient world embassies frequently issued polite fictions to explain their visits; cf. the Babylonian embassy to Hezekiah (2 K. 20:12). The queen's purpose, then, was to negotiate for overland trade between south Arabia and Israel; an arrangement suitable to both parties was presumably concluded (1 K. 10:13).

Trade flourished particularly between Israel and Tyre. Hiram supplied timber and gold for the temple in return for wheat and oil (1 K. 5:10f). Together the two kings operated the Red Sea fleet, which promoted trade with Arabia or East Africa ("Ophir"; cf. 9:26–28) and brought all sorts of treasures to the royal court at Jerusalem (10:11f, 22). The Phoenicians were the leading sea merchants of the time, and their skill and knowledge must have been invaluable to Solomon.

Solomon's home industries are not mentioned in the Bible, but archeological investigation has revealed his exploitation of Israel's mineral wealth. Copper, which abounded in the extreme south of his realm, was mined, refined, and shipped from Ezion-geber. These copper shipments were the original reason for constructing the Red Sea fleet. Since the Phoenicians were also skilled at refining metals, probably Solomon used their services in the copper industry. The chief artificer of the bronze work in the temple was a Tyrian, with the Tyrian name Hiram, although his mother was Israelite (1 K. 7:13–45).

The Temple

Solomon's greatest achievement, in the eyes of the biblical writers, was constructing a temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem. Proposed by David, it was completed by Solomon in the eleventh year of his reign, having taken seven years to erect (1 K. 6:38). *See* Temple for a full description. Since the architect was Tyrian, the temple exhibited features that were not all of purely Israelite conception; but the worship inaugurated in it was without doubt thoroughly Yahwistic in character. The temple was to have a profound influence on Israel, as its central shrine, housing the ark of the covenant; thus Solomon, for all his faults, was ever remembered as its builder, and his name was honored because of

it.

When the temple had been completed, a dedication ceremony was held. The ark was brought with great pomp from its temporary shrine in the city itself to the hill N of it where the temple stood (1 K. 8:1). Solomon himself uttered the prayer of dedication (vv 12–53; 2 Ch. 6) and an enormous number of animals were sacrificed (1 K. 8:63). The prayer includes a clear reference to an exile (8:46–51), but it is mainly attributable to Solomon, particularly in its references to Yahweh (e.g., vv 12f), which have parallels in the Râs Shamrah Tablets (see Gray, comm on 1 K. 8:32). Solomon is credited with having enriched the cultus in various ways, especially musically (cf. 10:12; 2 Ch. 5:11–13).

Other Buildings

Solomon erected a considerable complex of buildings N of the City of David. His own palace was probably even more magnificent than the temple, for it took almost twice as long to build (1 K. 7:1). It was called “the House of the Forest of Lebanon,” after its great cedar pillars (v 2). The building housed a “Hall of Pillars” and a “Hall of the Throne” (for judgment) (vv 6f). There was also a separate palace for his chief wife, Pharaoh’s daughter (v 8). See plan in Jerusalem III.C.2. All these were sumptuously furnished. Solomon’s building program — it included the fortification mentioned in II.C above — was very extravagant and endangered the economy, despite the flourishing commerce.

Wisdom

Above all else, Solomon is renowned for his wisdom. It is recorded that he asked Yahweh for discernment and wisdom (1 K. 3:7–9) and that Yahweh granted him the boon, together with long life and prosperity (vv 10–14). A single instance of his shrewdness in administering justice is given (vv 16–28). He is credited with three thousand proverbs (4:32), although no examples are given. But in view of his later reputation, it would be foolish to dismiss this as a groundless legend. His reign was, in fact, a golden age of literature. Many scholars agree that the court history of David and parts of the Pentateuch were written during this period of peace and prosperity. Wisdom literature, in particular, is evidenced in the Near East from the 2nd millennium b.c. so that even if the OT wisdom writings were not finally edited until postexilic times, there

is no reason to doubt that the beginnings of Israelite wisdom thought and writing can be placed in Solomon’s reign.

III. Failings

Despite all that Solomon did to boost Israel’s economy, his expenditure must have outweighed the income. Doubtless the oriental luxury of the court (cf. 1 K. 10:16–22) made the situation worse. The result was heavy taxation (cf. 4:7), which must have rankled many. Some of Solomon’s measures, moreover, such as the exploitation of the copper mines, demanded forced labor. It is not clear to what extent the *corvée* was applied to freeborn Israelites, for 5:13–18 and 9:20–22 seem to be mutually contradictory on this point; possibly different conditions prevailed in different periods of his reign. Nor is it clear whether Judah received preferential treatment. At any rate, the complaint of Israel in Rehoboam’s reign clearly indicates the extreme discontent with Solomon’s measures (12:4); it is noteworthy that Adoniram, the chief of the *corvée*, was killed by the angry populace (v 18).

The MT records no outright rebellion against Solomon, but toward the end of his reign a young and able Ephraimite, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, in some way incurred the king’s wrath and fled to the Egyptian court (1 K. 11:26–40), biding his time. Jeroboam clearly had political ambitions and received a measure of prophetic backing, but he apparently was given no time nor opportunity to cause Solomon trouble. The LXX, however, inserts a long passage in 12:24, claiming, perhaps correctly, that Jeroboam did in fact stage an abortive revolt.

If many Israelites felt they were badly treated, the vassal peoples had stronger reason to complain, for they had been used for slave labor since the time of David. No vassal state actually succeeded in breaking away from Solomon’s empire, but two of them caused him trouble. Hadad, a member of the royal house of Edom, long resided at the Egyptian court, fomenting what trouble he could in his own land (1 K. 14–22). In Damascus a guerrilla leader, Rezon, arose and called himself king of Damascus; Solomon never succeeded in apprehending him (vv 23–25).

Solomon began his reign faithful to Yahweh (1 K. 3:3), but he gradually lapsed. His huge harem was the main reason (11:1–8). No doubt Solomon himself worshiped no god but Yahweh; but he toler-

ated the idolatrous cults of his foreign wives and even had shrines built for them (vv 4–8). This, naturally enough, led many Israelites astray before long; the biblical writer found such conduct reprehensible and stated that Solomon's actions were the direct cause of the political unrest at the end of his reign. It was punishment from Yahweh for his apostasy (vv 9–14, 23).

So Solomon died, his empire intact but fast disintegrating. He reigned forty years, according to 1 K. 11:42 (2 Ch. 9:30), but this may be a round number. In Albright's chronology 922 b.c. is the approximate date of his death; Thiele (MNHK) placed it in 931.

Solomon exhibited great ability in a variety of fields; as a politician, diplomat, strategist, organizer, and administrator he excelled, and his poetry and proverbs apparently were equally admirable. Ruthlessness mars his early days as king, to modern

eyes; but he may well have noted the dire results of David's leniency, e.g., with Absalom. His real undoing was his lack of moderation. His extravagance in his harem, court luxury, and building schemes laid an impossible burden on his subjects, and moreover served to emphasize the contrast between his happy position and their own increasing poverty. Because of these failings, Solomon brought his empire to the brink of disruption from which Rehoboam, his son and successor, was unable to rescue it.

Bibliography

BHI; NHI; ORHI; comms on Kings by S. J. DeVries (*Word*, 1985); J. Gray (*OTL*, 2nd ed 1970); G. H. Jones (*NCBC*, 1984); J. A. Montgomery and S. Gehman (*ICC*, 1951); J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (1986).