

May 15

I Kings 4, 7, 10. II Chronicles 7-8, Psalm 72

Main points: Solomon's building projects and the evidence of his magnificent riches and wisdom. There is a clear effort in the Bible to demonstrate the power and wealth of Solomon. Why? Because his life defines the 'glory days' of Israel. This is the maximum reach and power and wealth of Israel, typified by the wealth of the king.

We open today with a description of the building of Solomon's own home, his palace. The reference to the 'Palace of the Forest of Lebanon' is because wood from Lebanon was some of the most valuable in the general vicinity. Some have speculated that Solomon must have built a palace for himself in the Forest of Lebanon, but a more easily understood interpretation of that name is that it was so named for the building materials out of which it was constructed. The palace was about 23,000 square feet. This is a HUGE house, but not so monstrous given that he had 1,000 wives and concubines to take care of. Nevertheless, we may deduce that Solomon lived in a house that was anything but shabby.

Solomon, also carried on extensive building projects. That was the reason for the levy, the taxes that King Solomon raised. He built the Temple, he built his own house, but then he built a lot of fortress cities as well, and a navy. He made a navy of ships in Ezion Geber, which is on the shore of the Red Sea. If the Phoenicians were controlling the Mediterranean Sea trade routes, Solomon built his port in the only logical place that he could, on the Red Sea, and he controlled trade from Asia from that port. The Queen of Sheba came from this direction - modern day Yemen and/or Ethiopia - to test his wisdom. She may have also come because he had cornered the trade market and she was negotiating some kind of a trade arrangement relating to his port.

Not only did Solomon build amazing cities, buildings and ships but he was also very wealthy both in wisdom and material possessions. I Kings wanted to leave no doubt that that in terms of wealth and wisdom -- Solomon was at the zenith, the apex, the top!! One verse that caught my attention was I Kings 10:24: "The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart." Can you believe that? People came from all over the world just to sit at the feet of Solomon and listen to what he had to say from God. We also learn more of the extent of his riches. One thing that caught my eye was that Solomon kept 12,000 horses. I remember a verse in Deuteronomy 17 which commanded "the king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself -- he must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." In this verse we see a reason for the prohibition against many wives but what about the possession of many horses? Perhaps Psalm 20 can give us some insight. It states: "Some trust in horses and some trust in chariots but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God." Horses meant chariots and indeed the account here very explicitly tells us that the reason Solomon kept 12,000 horses was he kept 4,000 chariots. God didn't want Solomon to depend upon an army, to

think that is what would keep him in power or make him strong in the eyes of the nations. God wanted Solomon to depend on God. "Some trust in horses and some trust in chariots but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God." The Psalm goes on to say, "They will fall down but we will rise up and stand firm." Although Solomon started out well following the Lord we will unfortunately see him violate all three of these prohibitions during his reign. And this excess is actually the beginning of the demise of his future kingdom.

So how far did Solomon's kingdom extend? From the Euphrates River in the east and north, far to the north of Syria, to the border of Egypt in the south and west, Solomon reigned over as much as "50,000 square miles." (which is about the size of Mississippi or Louisiana). If you look at a map of Israel at any other time in its history, that is truly amazing. God blessed David and the blessing and benediction continued through the reign of Solomon his son. Notice that this is the fulfillment of what God promised Abraham - that the land would extend from the Euphrates to Egypt. It is in this place that God keeps his promise about the land.

So how rich was Solomon exactly? We are told that Solomon's annual shipments of gold weighed 666 talents. Now, if the current price of gold is about \$1600 an ounce, multiply that by 16 ounces, times 750 pounds to a talent, times 666 talents. The first time I tried this I ran out of room on my calculator -- 12,784,800,000 (12 billion, 784 million, 800 thousand dollars) worth -- of gold alone. Multiply that by 40 years, the length of Solomon's reign, over 500 Billion just in gold, not counting precious stones, other commodities, or other sources of wealth. No wonder it says that nothing was made in silver in Solomon's day, because silver wasn't worth enough. Is it really possible that King Solomon was that rich? And his kingdom was that extensive? And he was really that wise? Is it really possible? Or have the biblical writers exaggerated for us?

Well, Warren Buffett - Look out - you've got nothing on Solomon! Watch in the coming days for how Solomon's wealth brings perspective on life. We will learn much from him in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes about what wealth will (and will not) bring.