

FIRST BOOK OF KINGS, KING SOLOMON AND THE TEMPLE, CHAPTERS 6-8, CA. 1000-900 BCE

The Book of Kings picks up the story of Israel at the death of King David (970 BCE) and describes the transgressions of his heirs over the course of the next four centuries-creating a justification for the Babylonian Empire's destruction of Israel and Judea in the sixth century BCE. This selection describes in painstaking detail the construction of the First Temple of Jerusalem, built by King Solomon (r. 970-931 BCE). After reading the lavish description of this holy site, consider the psychological effect of its complete destruction at the hands of the Babylonian invaders in 586 BCE.

CHAPTER 6

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left the land of Egypt, in the month of Ziv, that is, the second month of the fourth year of his reign over Israel, Solomon began to build the House of the LORD. 2 The House which King Solomon built for the LORD was 60 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. 3 The portico in front of the Great Hall of the House was 20 cubits long the width of the House and 10 cubits deep to the front of the House. 4 He made windows for the House, recessed and latticed. 5 Against the outside wall of the House- the outside walls of the House enclosing the Great Hall and the Shrine- he built a storied structure, and he made side chambers all around. 6 The lowest story was 5 cubits wide, the middle one 6 cubits wide, and the third 7 cubits wide, for he had provided recesses around the outside of the House so as not to penetrate the walls of the House. When the house was built, only finished stones cut at the quarry were used so that no hammer or, ax or any iron tool was heard in the House while it was being built. The entrance to the middle [story of] the side chambers were on the right side of the House, and wind-ing stairs led up to the middle chambers and from the middle chambers to the third story.

9 When he finished building the House, he paneled the House with beams and planks of cedar.

10 He built the storied structure. Against the entire house, each story is 5 cubits high so that it encases the house with cedar timbers.

11 Then the word of the LORD came to Solomon, 12 "With regard to this House you are building, you follow My laws and observe My rules and faithfully keep My commandments, I will fulfill for you the promise that I gave to your father, David:

13 I will abide among the children of Israel and never forsake My people, Israel." When Solomon had completed the construction of the House, 15he paneled the walls of the House on the inside with planks of cedar.

19 In the innermost part of the House, he fixed a shrine in which to place the Ark of the LORD's Covenant. 20 The interior of the Shrine was 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 20 cubits high. He overlaid it with solid gold; he similarly overlaid [its] cedar altar.

21 Solomon overlaid the interior of the House with solid gold, and he inserted golden chains into the door of the Shrine. He overlaid [the Shrine] with gold, 22 so that the entire House was overlaid with gold; he even over-laid the entire altar of the Shrine with gold. And so, the entire House was completed.

1n the Shrine; he made cherubim of olive wood, each 10 cubits high.

24 [One] had a wing measuring 5 cubits and another wing measuring 5 cubits so that the spread from wingtip to wingtip was 10 cubits; 25, and the wingspread of the other cherub was also 10 cubits. The two cherubim had the same measurements and proportions: 26. The height of one cherub was 10 cubits, and so was that of the other cherub.

He placed the cherubim inside the inner chamber. Since the wings of the cherubim were extended, a wing of the one touched one wall, and a wing of the other touched the other wall, while their wings in the center of the chamber touched each other. 28He overlaid the cherubim with gold.

29 All over the walls of the House, of both the inner area and the outer area, he carved reliefs of cherubim, palms, and calyxes, and he overlaid the floor of the House with gold, both the inner and the outer areas. For the entrance of the Shrine, he made doors of olive wood, the pilasters, and the doorposts having five sides.

32 The double doors were of olive wood, and on them, he carved reliefs of cherubim, palms, and calyxes. He overlaid them with gold, hammering the gold onto the cherubim and the palms.

33 For the entrance of the Great Hall, too, he made door-posts of oleaster wood, having four sides, 34 and the double doors of cypress wood, each door consisting of two rounded planks.

35 On them, he carved cherubim, palms, and calyxes, overlaying them with gold applied evenly over the carvings. 36 He built the inner enclosure of three courses of hewn stones and one course of cedar beams. In the fourth year, in the month of Ziv, the foundations of the House were laid;

38and in the eighth year, in the month of Bul- that is, the eighth month- the House was completed according to all its details and all its specifications. It took him seven years to build it. And Solomon made all the furnishings that were in the House of the LORD; the altar, of gold; the table for the bread of display, of gold; the lampstands-five on the right side and five on the left in front of the Shrine, of solid gold; and the petals, lamps, and tongs, of gold; 50the basins, snuffers, sprinkling bowls, ladles, and fire pans, of solid gold; and the hinge sockets for the doors of the innermost part of the House, the Holy of Holies, and for the doors of the Great Hall of the House, of gold. When all the work that King Solomon had done in the House of the LORD was completed, Solomon brought in the sacred donations of his father, David, the silver, the gold, and the vessels and deposited them in the treasury of the House of the LORD.

CHAPTER 8

1 Then Solomon convoked the elders of Israel-all the heads of the tribes and the ancestral chieftains of the Israelites-before King Solomon in Jerusalem to bring up the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD from the City of David, that is, Zion. All the men of Israel gathered before King Solomon at the Feast in the month of Ethanim - that is, the seventh month. 3 When all the elders of Israel had come, the priests lifted the Ark, 4 and carried up the Ark of the LORD. Then, the priests and the Levites brought the Tent of Meeting and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent. 5 Meanwhile, King Solomon and the whole community of Israel, who were assembled with him before the Ark, were sacrificing sheep and oxen in such abundance that they could not be numbered or counted.

The priests brought the Ark of the LORD'S Covenant to its place underneath the wings of the cherubim, in the Shrine of the House, in the Holy of Holies; 7for the cherubim had their wings spread out over the place of the Ark so that the cheru-bim shielded the Ark and its poles from above.

8 The poles were projected so that the ends of the poles were visible in the sanctuary in front of the Shrine, but they could not be seen outside, and there they remain to this day. 9 There was nothing inside the Ark but the two tablets of stone which Moses placed there at Horeb when the LORD made [a covenant] with the Israelites after their departure from the land of Egypt. 10 When the priests came out of the sanctuary for the cloud had filled the House of the LORD 11, and the priests were not able to remain and perform the service because of the cloud, for the Presence of the LORD filled the House of the LORD-12then Solo-mon declared: The LORD has chosen To abide in a thick cloud:

13 I have now built for You A stately House, A place where You May dwell forever. Then, with the whole congregation of Israel standing, the king faced about and blessed the whole congregation of Israel. 15 He said: "Praised be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has fulfilled with deeds the promise He made to my father David. For He said, 16'Ever since I brought My people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city among all the tribes of Israel for building a House where My name might abide; but I have chosen David to rule My people Israel.' "Now my father David had intended to build a House of the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, 'As regards your intention to build a House for My name, you did right to have that intention. 19However, you shall not build the House yourself; instead, your son, the issue of your loins, shall build the House for My name.' And the LORD has fulfilled the promise that He made: I have succeeded my father David and have as-cended the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised. I have built the House for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel 21 and I had set a place there for the Ark, containing the covenant which the LORD made with our fathers when He brought them out from the land of Egypt." Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of the whole community of Israel; he spread the palms of his hands toward heaven 23and said, "O LORD God of Israel, in the heavens above and on the earth below, there is no god like You, who keep Your gracious covenant with Your servants when they walk before You in whole-hearted devotion;

24You who have kept the promises You made to Your servant, my father David, fulfill-ing with deeds the promise You made, as is now the case. 25And now, O LORD God of Israel, keep the further promise that You made to Your servant, my father David: 'Your line on the throne of Israel shall never end if only your descendants will look to their way and walk before Me as you have walked before Me.' 26 Now, therefore, O God of Israel, let the prom-ise that You made to Your servant, my father David, be fulfilled. "But will God really dwell on the earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You; how much less this House that I have built! 28Yet turn, O LORD my God, to the prayer and supplication of Your servant, and hear the cry and prayer which Your servant offers before You this day. 29 May Your eyes be open day and night toward this House, toward the "But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You; how much less this House that I have built! 28Yet turn, O LORD my God, to the prayer and supplication of Your servant, and hear the cry and prayer which Your servant offers before You this day. 29 May Your eyes be open day and

night toward this House, toward the LORD. When Solomon finished offering to the LORD all this prayer and supplication, he rose from where he had been kneeling, in front of the altar of the LORD, his hands spread out toward heaven. 55 He stood and, in a loud voice, blessed the whole congregation of Israel:

56 "Praised be the LORD who has granted a haven to His people Israel, just as He promised; not a single word has failed of all the gracious promises that He made through His servant Moses.

57 May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He never abandon or forsake us. 57 May He incline our hearts to Him, that we may walk in all His ways and keep the commandments, the laws, and the rules which He enjoined upon our fathers. 59 And may these words of mine, which I have offered in supplication before the LORD, be close to the LORD our God day and night, that He may provide for His servant and for His people Israel, according to each day's needs-60 to the end that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD alone is God, there is no other. 61 And may you be wholehearted with the LORD our God, to walk in His ways and keep His commandments, even as now." The king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the LORD. 63 Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep as sacrifices of well-being to the LORD. Thus, the king and all the Israelites dedicated the House of the LORD.

Document Questions

1. What are the terms of God's covenant with Israel, and is there an implied threat if the terms of the contract are broken?
2. Why are the people and their priests advised to worship God and follow his very specific directions?