

BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

Vol. III, No. 10

©James B. Jordan, 1991

October, 1991

SOLOMON'S DISASTROUS GEOPOLITICS

by Jordan

Solomon began to build the Temple of the Lord in the fourth year of his reign, which was 480 years after Israel came out of Egypt, the year A.M. 3002 (1 Kings 6:1).

Seven years later, in the year A.M. 3009, the Temple building was finished (1 Kings 6:38). "The many ornate pieces-of furniture needed for the Temple were not yet made, however, and during the next thirteen years the palace of Solomon and his royal apartments were built, while the apparatus of the Temple worship was being created (1 Kings 7). Then, in A.M. 3013, both houses were finished (1 Kings 7:51; 9:10).

After Solomon dedicated the Temple and worship began to be conducted there, God appeared to Solomon. This was in the 24th year of his reign. God told him that if he remained faithful, the throne of David would be established over the kingdom of Israel perpetually. If Solomon sinned, however, the rule over Israel would be lost (1 Kings 9:1-9).

Virtually every time in the Bible that God gives a promise or a kingdom to someone, the first thing he does is ruin the promise by sinning against God. Adam did it. Abraham did it (committing polygamy with Hagar right after God told him he would have a son). Saul did it (1 Samuel 19-15). David did it, committing adultery with Bathsheba right after God promised to dwell in his house. Many other examples could be mentioned, but here we see it again.

God had told Solomon through Moses that there were three things the king must not do: multiply gold, reduce the people to servitude to build up a war machine, and commit polygamy (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). Shortly after we read that God appeared to Solomon and gave him the kingdom promise, we read that Solomon broke these three conditions.

First, he multiplied gold (1 Kings 10:14-22). He took in 666 talents of gold per year. The number is obviously significant. The actual weight is about 25 tons of gold per year. That is, 50,000 pounds of gold per year. That is, 800,000 ounces of gold per year. At \$400.00 per ounce, that comes to \$320,000,000.00. That's the least it might have been. Using the equivalent figures found in *The Open Bible*, (one talent of gold = \$5,760,000), we come to \$3,836,160,000.00. That's a lot of gold for a nation the size of New Jersey. Every year.

We are told that Solomon made 200 large ceremonial shields of beaten gold, using 600 shekels of gold on each large shield. These were used to form a "glory cloud" around the king (God's viceroy) when he walked across the common pavement between the royal palace to the palace of the High King (the T-)(1 Kings 14:28).

second, Solomon multiplied horses (1 Kings 10:26-29).

This offended the Lord, and the Lord raised up adversaries for Solomon.

The Egypt Factor

Egypt comes to prominence at this juncture of history. One way to understand the relevance of Egypt is to contrast Egypt with Tyre. Hiram, king of Tyre, had been a loyal ally of David. He loved David. He dearly was a converted man. When Solomon came to the throne, Hiram could not do enough for him. He volunteered to help build the Temple, because Israel's God was his God also (1 Kings 5). He showered Solomon with gifts (1 Kings 9:11, 14). If there was any nation Solomon should have allied with, it was Tyre.

Yet, Solomon gave Hiram a cheap and insulting present, and offended him (1 Kings 9:11-12; 2 Chronicles 8:2). Solomon evidently thought his relationship with Hiram was secure, and so did not try to please him. (I am reminded of how the "conservative" Reagan and Bush administrations constantly offend their Christian supporters – evidently because they regard them as "in their pocket" – while they pursue the goodwill of liberals and degenerates.)

Solomon chose to pursue Egypt instead, marrying the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kings 9:16). Solomon had actually married Pharaoh's daughter in his youth, perhaps with God's blessing. At least the Lord overlooked the matter (1 Kings 3:1ff.). Now, in his Adamic "fall," his rebellion against the promise God had given him, Solomon's relationships with Egypt are not overlooked.

Moses had forbidden the kings to engage in horse trading with Egypt (Deuteronomy 17:16). Solomon not only got horses from Egypt, but became a middle-man for horses between Egypt and other nations (1 Kings 10:26-29).

The folly of Solomon's involvement with Egypt is apparent from what we read in 1 Kings 11. It is evident that Pharaoh's policy as regards Palestine was to play all sides against each other. (How different from loyal Hiram!) Beck in David's day, the Israelites had defeated the Edomites, and the prince of Edom, Hadad, had fled to Egypt. There he was nurtured in Pharaoh's court, and Pharaoh made him his brother-in-law. When the time was ripe, Hadad took leave of Pharaoh and went to make trouble for Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-22). (It should be noted that Pharaoh tried to dissuade Hadad from this; v. 22. He didn't try very hard, though.)

Solomon's equine enterprise actively supplied the king of Syria with horses (1 Kings 11:26). Shortly thereafter, Syria was taken over by a man who hated the house of David, and who used those horses to plague Israel (1 Kings 11:23-25).

and the people had willingly volunteered (1 Kings 5:13-18). The actual citizens of Israel did not have to come and put in time working on the Temple, but they had to supply manpower from their serfs (1 Kings 9:20-22).

Now, as long as the Temple and palace were being built, the people did not mind supplying this labor. Afterwards, however, Solomon kept building and building. The citizens of Israel had to supply the manpower for this. The citizens themselves had to serve as conscripts in the army (1 Kings 9:22), and Moses had prohibited having a standing army. All of this amounted to a great financial burden, and the citizenry did not like it.

Solomon put Jeroboam the son of Nebat in charge of conscripting workers from Ephraim. Ephraim was the other great and powerful tribe, next to Judah, and they did not like this Judahite king taxing them so heavily. Jeroboam probably did a good job of bullying work out of the Ephraimites, until one day the prophet Ahijah informed him that God was going to let him have the rule over the ten northern tribes, as a way of punishing Solomon. Solomon caught wind of this, and Jeroboam fled to Egypt, where he was protected by Pharaoh (1 Kings 11:28-40).

came to the throne. The people³ appealed for tax relief, but Rehoboam told them that he was going to increase their taxes. As a result, the ten northern tribes seceded from the confederation of Israel and made Jeroboam their king, in the year A.M. 3030 (1 Kings 12).

Rehoboam was initially chastised by this turn of events, but he soon forsook the Lord and promoted all kinds of idolatry. The Lord prompted Pharaoh to invade Judah. Remember, Pharaoh had been a friend of Jeroboam's. Pharaoh doubtless regarded Solomon's exceedingly wealthy kingdom as too powerful. Accordingly, he must have rejoiced to hear that the kingdom had split in half. In the fifth year of Rehoboam, Pharaoh captured Jerusalem and helped himself to all the gold Solomon had stored up, including the 200 ceremonial gold shields. Rehoboam had to replace them with bronze ones (1 Kings 14:25-28).

Solomon ignored his friends (the Lord and Hiram) while he courted and curried favor with his enemies (Syria and Egypt). The result was disastrous to the nation.