

The Ideal United Kingdom (1 Chronicles 9:35 – 2 Chronicles 9:31)

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<p>The Reign of Solomon, part 9: More on Solomon's International Relations (2 Chronicles 8:16–9:21)</p>

More on Solomon's International Relations (8:16-9:21)

With the building projects of Solomon finished (8:1-15), the Chronicler continued to follow the account of Kings (// 1 Kgs 9:26-10:22). He added a new beginning to this material in 8:16 to identify another major division. Solomon had **established himself** (1:1), **gave orders to build a temple** (2:1), **began to build** (3:1), **summoned to Jerusalem** (5:2), **had finished the temple ... and the royal palace** (7:11), **at the end of twenty years... Solomon built** (8:1). At this point, the Chronicler added that **all of Solomon's work was carried out ... So the temple ... was finished** (8:16).

This section continues the Chronicler's large scale chiasm for Solomon's reign by returning to the theme of the king's international relations (see figure 23). From beginning to end, this passage deals with Solomon's southern maritime trade through the ports at Ezion Geber and Elath on the Red Sea (8:17). The balance between this passage and 2:1-18 is evident. It deals repeatedly with the recognition and assistance Solomon received from other nations. Moreover, Hiram is present throughout the material (8:18; 9:10,21) as he was in 2:1-18. By juxtaposing these elements in Solomon's reign, the Chronicler drew attention to another aspect of the ideal Solomon represented for the post-exilic Israelites as they struggled with the international environment of their day (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).

Comparison with 1 Kgs 9:26-10:22

For the most part the Chronicler's text closely parallels Kings. At times it is difficult to know if small differences between Chronicles and Kings reflect the Chronicler's intentions or merely represent stylistic variations or problems in textual transmission. Nevertheless, four dissimilarities deserve special mention.

First, the Chronicler added a new beginning to this section (8:16). By this means he separated these events from Solomon's earlier accomplishments and indicated the beginning of a major portion of Solomon's reign.

Second, the Chronicler changed the language of 1 Kgs 10:9 ("on the throne of Israel") to **on his [God's] throne as king to rule for the Lord your God** (9:8). This variation fit well with his repeated emphasis that the king of Israel was God's vice-regent (see *Introduction: 8) Divine Kingship*).

Third, on two occasions the Chronicler added a role for Solomon and his men in conjunction with Hiram's sailors in order to highlight Solomon's leading role in international relations (8:17 // 1 Kgs 9:26; 9:10 // 1 Kgs 10:11).

Fourth, the Chronicler varied from 1 Kgs 10:13 ("besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty") to **more than she had brought to him** (9:12a). This change exalted Solomon as the dominant party in the relationship with the queen of Sheba.

Structure of 8:16-9:21

After an introductory note (8:16), the entire section divides into three parts including reports, a brief narrative and one fully developed narrative (see figure 23). This portion of Solomon's reign begins and ends with records of Hiram helping Solomon establish a successful maritime operation (8:17-18; 9:15-21). This frame establishes the main concern of the text. The pivotal middle portion focuses on Arabian reactions to Solomon's successful foreign trade (9:1-14).

Transitional Introduction (8:16)

The Chronicler added this verse to provide a temporal setting for the events that followed. This brief introduction repeats the same motif twice. First, the Chronicler noted that **all Solomon's work was carried out ... until [the temple's] completion**. Then he added that **the temple of the Lord was finished** (8:16). Although this portion of Solomon's reign deals with Solomon's international trade, it was vital to the Chronicler's ideal portrait of Solomon to establish that the king gave himself fully to developing international trade only after he had first accomplished his most important task, the building of the temple. The implications for the Chronicler's readers are evident. Their priorities must be the same: the temple and its services first, then international trade and national prosperity (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).

Solomon and Hiram Open Maritime Trade (8:17-18)

Following the parallel material in Kings rather closely (// 1 Kgs 26-27), the Chronicler presented a brief narrative recording the initiation of Solomon's maritime trade on the Red Sea. The account divides into three parts (see figure 23).

The opening of this brief account mentions Solomon as the initiator of a new trade venture. **Ezion Geber and Elath** were Edomite ports on the northwestern portion of the Red Sea (8:17). 1 Kgs 9:26 reads, "Solomon also built ships," but the Chronicler varied slightly and wrote **Solomon went** (8:17). By doing so, he emphasized Solomon's personal responsibility for the successful maritime effort.

These ports of Edom were Israel's nearest access to the Red Sea and lucrative maritime trade with Africa and India. Until this time, Israel depended primarily on Arabian caravans to bring goods from these regions across the Arabian desert. Now Israel had direct access to this commerce.

Solomon was not ready to accomplish this task on his own. Israel had little experience in sea travel. As a result, **Hiram**, king of the Mediterranean port at Tyre, assisted Solomon. He **sent him ships commanded by his own officers, men who knew the seas** (8:18a). The mention of Hiram recalls Hiram's earlier help with Solomon's building projects (see 2:3-16). This lifelong ally was also instrumental in Solomon's international trade.

The initial success of Solomon's venture stands out quickly. **Solomon's men** and Hiram's experienced sailors, travel to **Ophir** (8:18b). The location of Ophir is not certain; it could have been in Northwestern Africa (in the region of modern Somalia), on the South Arabian coast, or further east. The reference to the "three year journey" (see 9:21) suggests that it may have been at a far distance. In all events, Ophir was known for its fine gold and other rare goods (see Job 28:16; Ps 45:9; Isa 13:12).

More than this, the success of Solomon's effort becomes evident in the amount of goods the seamen brought back. They returned with **four hundred and fifty talents of gold**, about 17 (16 metric) tons (18:18).

Solomon's success in this international commercial venture offered the Chronicler's readers an important perspective on their own lives. When Israel's king and temple are in proper order, there are hardly any limits on the prosperity that may come to the nation through lucrative international trade (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).

Solomon's and Arabian Reactions (9:1-14)

At the time Solomon was extending his trade routes with Hiram's help, a number of Arabian states thrived because of trade with Africa and the Far East. Their Southern coastal cities served as convenient ports for desert caravans which transferred exotic goods inland. It would have been natural for these Arabians to be hostile toward Solomon. Nevertheless, their response was just the opposite. As the Chronicler's text reports, the Arabians were so impressed with Solomon's success that they sought to please him.

The account of Arabian reactions divides into two parts (see figure 23): the reaction of the Queen of Sheba (9:1-12) and the reactions of other Arabian monarchs (9:13-14).

The Queen of Sheba Honors Solomon (9:1-12)

Following the text of Kings (//1 Kgs 10:1-13) with only a few stylistic changes, the Chronicler first recorded the reaction of the **queen of Sheba** (9:1). This full scale narrative divides into five steps (see figure 23). The Queen of Sheba came to Solomon (9:1) and returned home (9:12b). Solomon answered her questions (9:2), gained her admiration (9:3-9), and responded favorably to her (9:12a). Following this story is a note on Hiram's fleet and how it benefited Solomon with the kinds of goods that gained the queen's admiration (9:10-11).

The Queen Comes to Solomon (9:1)

The **queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame** because of his new ventures into her commercial arena (9:1). Archaeological research strongly suggests that Sheba was a commercial sea port located along the coast of southwest Arabia. As such, the queen had heard reports from those who traded with Solomon's fleet sailing from Ezion-Geber and Elath (see 8:17-18). She doubted the reports of Solomon's wisdom (see 9:6) and came **to test him with hard questions** (9:1). She spoke **with him about all she had on her mind** including economic matters (9:1). She came with **a very great caravan** to establish good relations with the King of Israel (9:1).

Solomon Answers the Queen's Questions (9:2)

Solomon passed the queen's test. He answered **all her questions** without difficulty. Her best efforts to expose his shortcomings were unsuccessful; **nothing was too hard for him** (9:2). This feature of the story fits well with the view that Solomon was the wisest of all kings (see 2 Chr 9:23; see also 1 Kgs 3:12; 4:29-31; 5:12; 10:23).

The Queen Admires Solomon (9:3-9)

The Chronicler continued following the account of Kings by reporting the queen's reaction to Solomon (// 1 Kgs 10:4-10). At this point the pace of the story slows tremendously to allow the readers time to ponder the queen's reaction to Solomon. Her response divides into three parts: her experience in Solomon's court (9:3-4), her praise for Solomon (9:5-8), and her gift to Solomon (9:9).

The passage first reports the queen's experience in Solomon's court (9:3-4). In a word, **she was overwhelmed** (literally, "she was breathless" [see (NRS and NKJ) (9:4)]. Her reaction was not simply to Solomon's answers to her riddles. She saw **the wisdom of Solomon**, but was also impressed with his **palace ... food ... his officials ... attending servants ... cupbearers and burnt offerings** (perhaps "his stairway" NAS [9:3]).

As a result of seeing Solomon's court, the queen offered extensive praise (9:5-8). Her words of admiration began with a focus on Solomon himself (9:5-7) and then turned to Solomon's God (9:8). She first admitted that the report she received **in [her] own country ... was true** (9:5). She admitted that she **did not believe what they said** until she saw **with [her] own eyes** (9:6). Having witnessed Solomon's greatness herself, she concluded that reality **far exceeded the report** (9:6). Then she extolled Solomon by expressing her envy of those who **continually stand before [him] and hear [his] wisdom** (9:7).

These words of exuberant praise for Solomon offer significant confirmation for the Chronicler's perspective. He had repeatedly asserted Solomon's incomparability, but now confirmation came from the lips of a skeptical foreign queen. Solomon's greatness was not an Israelite exaggeration; it was an internationally recognized fact.

To highlight the queen's reaction even more, the passage reports how she offered praise to Solomon's God (9:8). This event falls in line with Solomon's desire for foreigners to recognize his God (see 6:32-33). Apparently, Solomon not only exposed the queen to his political successes, but to his religion as well (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*). Her language of praise indicates a deep awareness of Israel's concept of the relation of divine and human kingship. The Chronicler shifted the language of 1 Kgs 10:9 ("on the throne of Israel") to **on his [God's] throne as king to rule for the Lord your God** (9:8). The idea that the Davidic throne was the throne of God appears several times in Chronicles (see *Introduction: 8) Divine Kingship*). The queen also recognized Solomon's throne as a benevolence to the nation. God made Solomon king **because of the love of ... God for Israel and his desire to uphold them forever** (9:8). This theme also appears a number of times in Chronicles (see *Introduction: 4-9) King and Temple*). Finally, the queen mentioned that the divine purpose for Solomon's throne was to **maintain justice and righteousness**, a motif often associated with the Davidic line (see 2 Sam 8:15; 23:3-5; 1 Chr 18:14; 1 Kgs 3:11,28; 10:9; Ps 72:1-2; Isa 9:6-7; 16:5).

By maintaining this passage from Kings in his history, the Chronicler once again supported points of view presented elsewhere in his history. Solomon's wisdom was so great that it convinced even a foreigner of the divine purpose of kingship in Israel. If one outside of Israel understood these things, surely the post-exilic Israelites to whom he wrote should acknowledge the importance of the Davidic line for their day.

Gifts to Solomon (9:9)

As was the custom in the ancient Near East, the queen of Sheba gave wonderful gifts to Solomon. She delivered **120 talents of gold** (about 4.5 tons [4 metric tons]). Moreover she gave him **large quantities of spices** the likes of which **had never been** in Israel (9:9). No doubt, these spices came from the Far East and were very rare in the Mediterranean world. The exotic quality of the queen's gifts not only revealed the wealth she had, they also enhanced the wonder of Solomon's ideal kingdom in the eyes of the Chronicler's readers.

A Note on Solomon's Wealth from Hiram's Fleet (9:10-11)

At this point the Chronicler followed the book of Kings (// 1 Kgs 10:11-12) and added a tangential note. Perhaps he felt a need to explain why the Arabian queen was so impressed with Solomon. Whatever the case, the text mentions items procured by Hiram's fleet. The Chronicler changed "Hiram's ships" (1 Kgs 10:11) to **the men of Hiram and the men of Solomon** (9:10 // 1 Kgs 10:11) to emphasize Solomon's involvement. The list of items remains the same: **gold from Ophir** (see 8:18), **algumwood and precious stones** (9:10). Mentioned also are the uses to which Solomon put the algumwood: **steps for the temple and harps and lyres for the musicians** (9:11). These items were beyond compare **in Judah** (9:11).

Solomon Responds to the Queen's Admiration (9:12a)

In response to the queen's words and actions, Solomon gave her **all she desired and asked** (9:12a). As noted above, the Chronicler shifts the language of 1 Kgs 10:13 ("besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty") to **more than she had brought to him** (9:12a). This change was designed to exalt Solomon beyond the generosity demonstrated by the queen of Sheba. This shift was important to the Chronicler's readers. Although Solomon benefited from his relations with others, he was always the dominant partner. Nothing less was his ideal for the post-exilic community (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).

The Queen Departs from Solomon (9:12b)

To close off the story, the text reports that the queen of Sheba returned home **with her retinue** (9:12b). She left richer than when she came. Solomon had received blessing from her, but he in turn was a blessing to her. This theme recalls the patriarchal promise to the same effect (see Gen 12:1-3).

Arabian Kings Acknowledge Solomon (9:13-14)

These verses are repeated with little changed from 1 Kgs 10:14-16. They first offer a summation of Solomon's riches. The wealth received by Solomon is counted at **666 talents of gold** (about 25 tons [23 metric tons]) (9:13). Mention is then made of the **gold and silver** brought by **all the kings of Arabia and the governors** (9:13). The connection with the preceding narrative of the queen of Sheba is evident. These were Solomon's competitors in trade, but like the queen of Sheba, they acknowledged Solomon as their superior.

Solomon and Hiram in Maritime Trade (9:15-21)

Continuing his dependence on Kings (// 1 Kgs 10:16-22), the Chronicler listed a number of items Solomon made from his vast wealth. The emphasis of this material appears in the repetition of the word **made** (9:11,15,17,19).

First, Solomon made numerous items of **gold** (9:15 [twice], 16 [twice]). He made **large shields** (9:15) and **small shields of hammered gold** (9:16). These smaller shields were carried off by Shishak after his attack on Jerusalem in Rehoboam's day (see 12:1-12). Solomon placed these **in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon** (9:16). The palace received this name because of four rows of large cedar pillars that gave the impression of a forest (see 1 Kgs 7:2).

Second, Solomon decorated his throne elaborately (9:17-19). It was **inlaid with ivory and overlaid with pure gold** (9:17). **Six steps** led up to a **footstool of gold** (9:18). The images of royal **lions** decorated the **armrests and steps** (9:18-19). The purpose of these details is explicitly stated. They exalted Solomon's glory for **nothing like it had been made for any other kingdom** (9:19).

Third, the **goblets and household articles** in the palace were all made of **pure gold ... because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's day** (9:20). Once again, Solomon's kingdom is exalted as ideal.

To connect this material to its context, the text notes the source of much of these riches. **Once every three years the trading fleet manned by Hiram's men** brought back great treasures (9:21). This reference to Hiram frames the assorted material in 8:17-9:21. Solomon's interaction with other nations is not limited to this passage and its earlier parallel (2:1-18), but the concern with Hiram pervades the material.

Solomon's relation with Hiram illustrated for the post-exilic readers the kind of positive benefits that came to Solomon from this relationship. In a day when the economic conditions of Israel were in need of much improvement, Solomon's willingness to engage in international trade provided guidance for those who had returned to the land (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*).