



First Kings - Chapter Five

I 1 Kings 1:1-11:43 - The Reign of King Solomon (continues)

Summary of Chapter Five

Because of his friendship with David, King Hiram of Tyre made a treaty with Solomon, whereby he would supply the timber for the building of the temple in Jerusalem and Solomon would supply food and labour for Hiram.

In the Hebrew text, these 18 verses form part of the same unit as the material on Solomon's rule over the surrounding kingdoms and his immense wisdom. The preparation for the building of the temple is thus part of the discourse about Solomon and the nations, and King Hiram of Tyre is simply one of those who served Solomon all the days of his life, and where Lebanon is part of all the land of Solomon's dominion.

I.e 1 Kings 5:1-18 - Preparations and Materials for the Temple

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend to David. ² Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, ³ 'You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. ⁴ But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. ⁵ So I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to my father David, "Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name." ⁶ Therefore command that cedars from the Lebanon be

cut for me. My servants will join your servants, and I will give you whatever wages you set for your servants; for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians.'

1 Kings 5:1-6

Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father. Such diplomacy was normal among nations at peace or where one nation was subservient to another: <<*Some time afterwards the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him. David said, 'I will deal loyally with Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father dealt loyally with me.'* So David sent envoys to console him concerning his father>> (2 Samuel 10:1-2a).

For Hiram had always been a friend to David. In this case Tyre was at peace with Israel for Hiram and David had become good friends. In fact, Hiram had provided the materials for David's palace: <<*King Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar trees, and carpenters and masons who built David a house*>> (2 Samuel 5:11). David was a mighty warrior against the enemies of Israel. However, he did not regard every neighbouring nation as his enemy. David wisely built alliances and friendships with his neighbours, and the benefit of this also came to King Solomon. Hiram is an abbreviation of Ahiram which means 'Brother of Ram', or 'My brother is exalted', or 'Brother of the lofty one'. Archæologists have discovered a royal sarcophagus in Byblos of Tyre dated about 1200 BC inscribed with the king's name, Ahiram. Some believe it belonged to the man in this passage, although it is dated considerably earlier than the time of Solomon.

Tyre was a Gentile city in Phoenicia and it was often the object of condemnation by OT prophets for their Baal worship and arrogant materialism. Excavations have unearthed many remarkable finds at Tyre. It evidences both Roman and Byzantine structures including, largely from after Jesus' time: a hippodrome; an immense bathhouse; a forum; a theatre; and tombs. Tyre was originally an offshore island later connected to the mainland during a siege in the days of Alexander the Great in the 4th Century BC.

Tyre was an important commercial city that was thought of as impossible to conquer. The Assyrians laid siege against Tyre for five years but never conquered the city. Nebuchadnezzar tried for 13 years to conquer Tyre, but Alexander did it in seven months. Alexander the Great conquered Tyre by laying siege to it for seven months then, by using the rubble from the old city, he made a causeway out to the island city. It was a spectacular achievement of both military and engineering strategy. This was the event that many believe was prophesied by Zechariah in the 5th Century BC: <<*Tyre has built itself a rampart, and heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets.*

But now, the Lord will strip it of its possessions and hurl its wealth into the sea, and it shall be devoured by fire>> (Zechariah 9:3-4).

Solomon sent word to Hiram. According to Josephus in Jewish Antiquities, 8.2.8, copies of such a letter along with Hiram's reply were preserved in both Hebrew and Tyrian archives and were extant in his day.

David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God. Solomon's response to Hiram's greeting takes Hiram back to that important moment in David's life, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:1-17, when David was addressed by God, not only about the succession, which has just happened, but also about the temple which has not yet been built. This means that David discussed spiritual matters with Hiram, things that one might think Hiram could not understand or had interest in. In some ways, David spoke to Hiram as if Hiram were already an Israelite. This chapter deals with Solomon's work in obtaining the materials to build the temple. Yet David was so interested in this work that he had already gathered many of the supplies needed to build the temple: ***<<David gave orders to gather together the aliens who were residing in the land of Israel, and he set stonecutters to prepare dressed stones for building the house of God. David also provided great stores of iron for nails for the doors of the gates and for clamps, as well as bronze in quantities beyond weighing, and cedar logs without number – for the Sidonians and Tyrians brought great quantities of cedar to David>> (1 Chronicles 22:2-4).***

The Lord put them under the soles of his feet. To put enemies under the feet was the symbolic act marking conquest. In contemporary art enemies were often depicted as a footstool: ***<<The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'>> (Psalm 110:1),*** which Jesus quotes in Matthew 22:44. Similar verses are written by David again: ***<<You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet>> (Psalm 8:6),*** and by Paul about Christ: ***<<For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet>> (1 Corinthians 15:25).***

But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side. God has given Solomon the rest on every side that he had promised to David in 2 Samuel 7:11, so much so that **there is neither adversary nor misfortune.** This picture reflects God's intended result when the people of Israel have a wise ruler and they walk in obedience to God's commandments. Given this situation, the time is right for the temple-building project, divinely ordained as the task for David's successor; refer to 2 Samuel 7:12-13. The word **adversary** here is literally Satan. The Latin Vulgate translates this, 'nor a Satan.'

Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name. Of course, Solomon did not build a temple for a name but for a living God. This is a good example of avoiding direct mention of the name of God in

Hebrew writing and speaking. They did this out of reverence to God. Solomon also used this phrase because he wanted to explain that he did not think the temple would be the house of God in the way pagans thought. It is to be a house for the name of the Lord. That is not the same as for the Lord. Pagan temples might be intended by their builders for the actual residence of the god, but Solomon knew that the heaven of heavens could not contain him, much less this house which he was about to build: *<<But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!>>* (1 Kings 8:27). Paul voiced this most eloquently in Athens: *<<The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things>>* (Acts 17:24-25).

The name of God is, of course, vitally important for the name reflects the character of God. It is for this reason that God is so passionate that his name should be honoured and glorified among men and angels alike: *<<I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name>>* (Leviticus 20:3), *<<For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel>>* (Isaiah 29:23), *<<Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name>>* (Ezekiel 39:25), and: *<<Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgements have been revealed>>* (Revelation 15:4).

My servants will join your servants, and I will give you whatever wages you set for your servants. Solomon suggests to Hiram a cooperative venture and, possibly (although the Hebrew is apparently ambiguous), that Hiram should set the wages to be paid to his men.

Therefore command that cedars from the Lebanon be cut for me. The cedar trees of Lebanon were legendary for their excellent timber. This means Solomon wanted to build the temple out of the best materials possible.

Sidonians is a general term for the Phoenicians, famous for their expertise in timber. Sidon, like Tyre, was on the Phoenician coast, south of what is now Beirut.

The Sidonians were noted as timber craftsmen in the ancient world, a fact substantiated on the famous Palmyra Stone. Its inscription from 2200 BC speaks about timber-carrying ships that sailed from Byblos to Egypt about four hundred years previously. The skill of the Sidonians was expressed in their ability to

pick the most suitable trees, know the right time to cut them, fell them with care, and then properly treat the logs.

It also means that Solomon was willing to build this great temple to God with Gentile wood and using Gentile labour. This was a temple to the God of Israel, but it was not only for Israel. Only Jews built the tabernacle, but the temple is not built without the aid of the Gentile Tyrians.



The map shows Tyre and Sidon in relation to Jaffa and Jerusalem

⁷ When Hiram heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly, and said, ‘Blessed be the Lord today, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people.’ ⁸ Hiram sent word to Solomon, ‘I have heard the message that you have sent to me; I will fulfil all your needs in the matter of cedar and cypress timber.

1 Kings 5:7-8

Blessed be the Lord. Hiram, a Gentile, recognises God’s blessing on his great people, Israel. It cannot be known if Hiram was a saved man, but he certainly

respected the God of Israel. This was no doubt due to David's godly influence over him and shows how important living a godly life is for it impacts on others. This idea is also seen in the life of Moses' Midianite father-in-law: <<**Jethro said, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh'**>> (Exodus 18:10).

⁹ My servants shall bring it down to the sea from the Lebanon; I will make it into rafts to go by sea to the place you indicate. I will have them broken up there for you to take away. And you shall meet my needs by providing food for my household.' ¹⁰ So Hiram supplied Solomon's every need for timber of cedar and cypress. ¹¹ Solomon in turn gave Hiram twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty cors of fine oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year. ¹² So the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. There was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and the two of them made a treaty.

1 Kings 5:9-12

My servants shall bring it down to the sea from the Lebanon. Hiram responds with proposals of his own – that his own men alone should deal with cutting the wood and transporting it down the coast to Israel, and that Solomon's men should be involved only after this has been done. The timber would be floated from Tyre to Joppa, modern-day Jaffa, and from there transported to Jerusalem overland: <<**We will cut whatever timber you need from Lebanon, and bring it to you as rafts by sea to Joppa; you will take it up to Jerusalem**>> (2 Chronicles 2:16).

The wages, moreover, are to be paid not to his labourers, but in the form of supplies of food for his royal household. Solomon thus gets what he needs or desires, Hebrew *khepets* (v.8 and v.10), in the materials for the temple, but Hiram, too, has his needs or wishes, Hebrew *khepets* (v.9) for provisions fulfilled. It is apparently a happy arrangement, sealed by a treaty – an arrangement that is testimony to the wisdom that God has given to Solomon. Yet nothing has been said about Hiram's first counterproposal to Solomon concerning work methods; the narrative proceeds as if he had not spoken, as a task force from Israel is dispatched to Lebanon 'in shifts' to help with the timber (v.14). Although he is happy to negotiate with Hiram to a certain extent, Solomon is also prepared to ignore terms that do not suit him. This clearly implies that Solomon has the upper hand in the relationship, something that becomes even more apparent in 1 Kings 9:10-10:29. At the same time, Hiram did expect to be paid. His service and the service of his people were not a gift or a sacrifice. There are a good many people who get mixed up with religious work, and talk as if it were very near their hearts,

who have as sharp an eye to their own advantage as he had. The person who serves God *because* he gets paid for it, does not serve him at all.

Solomon in turn gave Hiram twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty cors of fine oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year. A cor equalled 220 litres or about 48 gallons. Therefore, the annual gift of wheat was in excess of 4,000 tonnes.

There was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and the two of them made a treaty. Solomon - in his God-given wisdom - continued the friendly relationship between Israel and Lebanon.

¹³ King Solomon conscripted forced labour out of all Israel; the levy numbered thirty thousand men.

1 Kings 5:13

King Solomon conscripted forced labour out of all Israel. First Kings 9:15-23 makes it clear that Solomon did not conscript Israelites to work abroad, but only workers from the Canaanite population of Israel. Two quite distinct groups are intended in vv.13-18 and 1 Kings 9:15-23. The first comprises thirty thousand Canaanites and is supervised by 550 officials; the other comprises 150,000 Israelites and is supervised by 3,300 foremen.

The levy numbered thirty thousand men. This huge labour force shows the temple could only be built when Israel could afford the manpower and the materials. It could only be built under the peace and prosperity won by David and enjoyed by Solomon.

¹⁴ He sent them to the Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts; they would be a month in the Lebanon and two months at home; Adoniram was in charge of the forced labour.

1 Kings 5:14

At home. According to some commentators the Hebrew *bebeto*, 'in his house,' likely refers to Solomon's house or palace, the construction of which will be described in Chapter 7. Even at this stage, the authors hint, Solomon is spending twice as much time on his palace, his house, as on the temple (1 Kings 6:38-7:1), while appearing to press quickly ahead with the temple. The other option for the phrase at home is that it could mean that the workforce spent one month working abroad and two months looking after their own affairs. This would certainly have been the case with Israelite workers and seems a more appropriate way to treat the Canaanites as well, as they would be better motivated for the work, even if they were conscripts.

It can be argued that Solomon's treatment of the Canaanites, and indeed modern Israel's treatment of Palestinians is not in keeping with the commandments of God: <<*The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 19:34).

Adoniram was in charge of the forced labour. Solomon's wisdom was evident in the way he employed this great workforce. First, he wisely delegated responsibility to men like Adoniram. Second, instead of making the Israelites work constantly away from Israel and home, he worked them in shifts.

¹⁵ Solomon also had seventy thousand labourers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, ¹⁶ besides Solomon's three thousand three hundred supervisors who were over the work, having charge of the people who did the work. ¹⁷ At the king's command, they quarried out great, costly stones in order to lay the foundation of the house with dressed stones. ¹⁸ So Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders and the Gebalites did the stonecutting and prepared the timber and the stone to build the house.

1 Kings 5:15-18

Solomon also had seventy thousand labourers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country. This seems to describe the number of Canaanite slave labourers that Solomon used.

Besides Solomon's three thousand three hundred supervisors who were over the work. This was the middle management team administering the work of building the temple. The Chronicler records there were three thousand six hundred supervisors and many commentators believe this to be the more reliable figure.

They quarried out great, costly stones. This is literally quality stones, showing that Solomon used high quality materials even in the foundation where the stones could not be seen. These stones were also prepared and dressed at the quarry as a mark of respect for the holiness of the temple site: <<*The house was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple while it was being built*>> (1 Kings 6:7).

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "This speaks to the way we should work for God. We do not work for appearance only, but also to excel in the deep and hidden things. I want, dear friends, to urge that all our work for God should be done thoroughly, and especially that part of it which lies lowest, and is least observed of men. This speaks to the way God works in us. He works in the deep and hidden things when others are concerned with mere appearances. We

have been the subjects of a great deal of secret, unseen, underground work. The Lord has spent upon us a world of care. My brother, you would not like to unveil those great searchings of heart of which you have been the subject. You have been honoured in public; and, if so, you have had many a whipping behind the door lest you should glory in your flesh. All those chastenings, humblings, and searchings of heart have been a private laying of foundations for higher things. This speaks to the way God builds the church. He wants to do a work of deep, strong foundations instead of a work a mile wide but an inch deep. To maintain solid truth you need solid people. Vital godliness is therefore to be aimed at. Twenty thousand people, all merely professing faith, but having no energetic life, may not have grace enough among them to make twenty solid believers. Poor, sickly believers turn the church into a hospital, rather than a camp.”

Dressed stones probably describes ashlar masonry, a prominent feature of royal Israelite architecture. Fine examples of ashlar masonry may be seen at Megiddo (10th-9th Centuries BC), Gezer (10th Century BC), Tel Dan, Ramet Rahel, and elsewhere. The actual quarries for ashlar blocks have been found at Megiddo and Samaria.

The Gebalites are workers from Byblos at the foot of Mount Libanus, a coastal city north of Tyre. In Joshua 13:5 Byblos is recorded as part of the area of the Promised Land that had still not been conquered at the end of Joshua’s life.