



## Second Chronicles - Chapter Two

- II 1 Chronicles 10:1-2 Chronicles 9:31 - The United Kingdom of David and Solomon (continues)
- f. 2 Chronicles 1:1-2:18 - Solomon's Temple Preparations (continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Two

Time came for Solomon to start building the temple and a palace for himself. He renewed his father's alliance with King Hiram of Tyre and struck a deal with him to provide skilled workers and materials for the building project. The main craftsman was to be Hiram-abi of Tyre although his mother was from the tribe of Dan. Solomon then had a census taken of the foreigners living in Israel and put them to work as conscripted labour.

#### II.f.iii 2 Chronicles 2:1-2 - Preparations for Building the Temple

This summary statement introduces the conscripted labour that would be used to build the temple and a palace for Solomon.

<sup>1</sup> Solomon decided to build a temple for the name of the Lord, and a royal palace for himself.

#### 2 Chronicles 2:1

Solomon decided to build a temple for the name of the Lord. It was always known that God would place his name in Israel: <<***But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there***>> (Deuteronomy 12:5a). God's name in association with a place signifies his actual presence there among his people, where God may be met and petitioned. Yet in no sense is God contained or limited by his localised presence. The Chronicler's temple theology embraces both the actual or real

presence of God and his majestic transcendence. It is a forerunner to the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Christ: <<*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14), <<*But he was speaking of the temple of his body*>> (John 2:21).

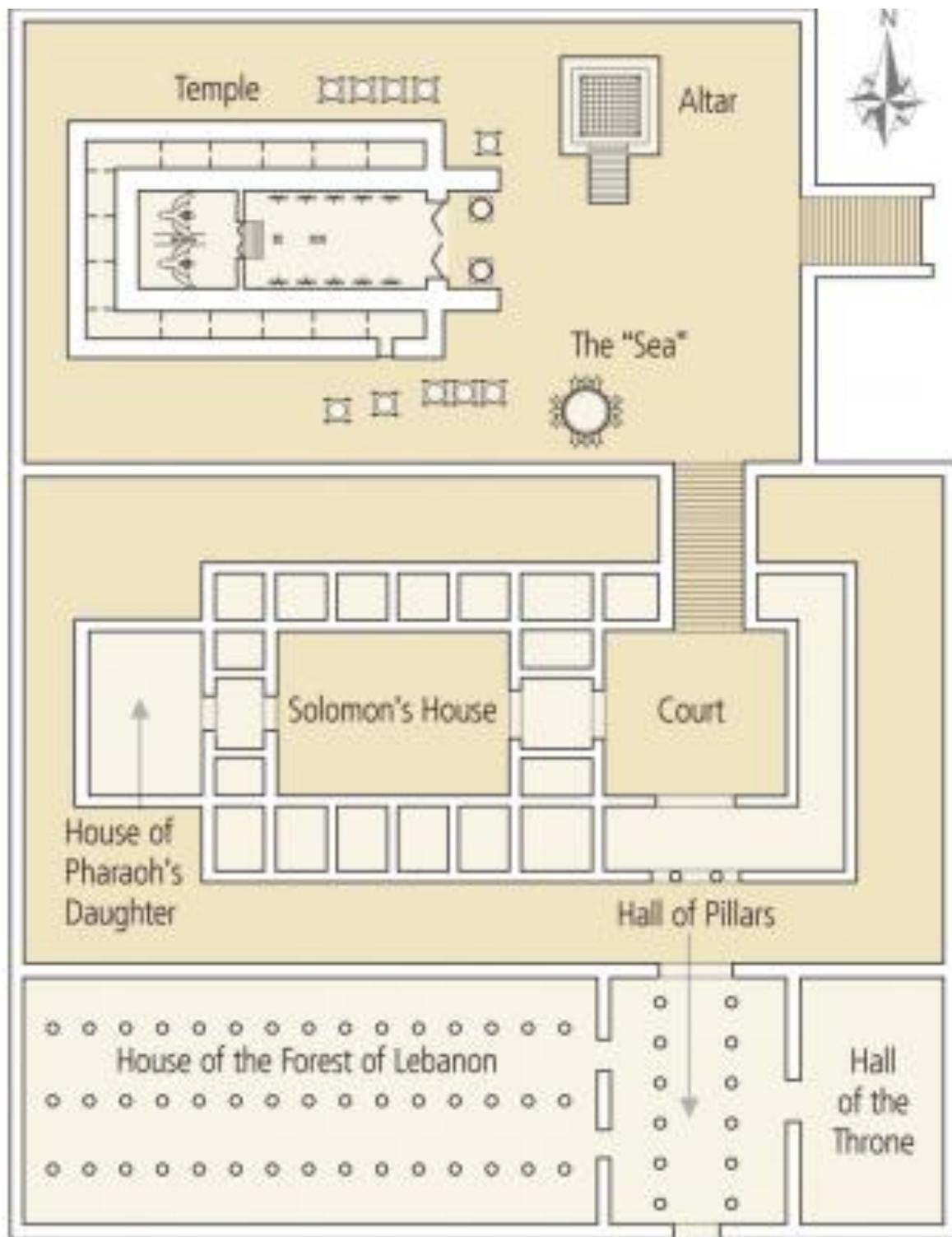
The sense here is not so much that Solomon decided to build the temple but that he determined to. His determination was fitting because of all that his father David did in preparation for the building and because of the charge David had given him to do the work. It might be thought that the greatest thing about Solomon was his wisdom, his riches, his proverbs or his writings. Clearly for the Chronicler the most important thing about Solomon was the temple he built. This was most important because it was most relevant to a community of returning exiles who struggled to build a new temple and to make a place for Israel among the nations once again.

The Chronicler's record of Solomon's achievements moves straight away to the construction of the temple. Several important items in the account of his reign in Kings are left out as a result, such as his wisdom in action, administration, educational reforms, and some building activities, e.g. 1 Kings 3:16, 4:34 and 7:1-12. These were not unimportant, but for the Chronicler they were all subsidiary to the temple.

And a royal palace for himself is linked here with the temple, perhaps to indicate the close connection between the two 'houses' of the Davidic covenant; refer to 1 Chronicles 17:14. Solomon's great building works did not end with temple. He also built a spectacular palace and more. While the Chronicler mentions Solomon's palace a number of times, he passes over the account of its construction; refer to 1 Kings 7:1-12 for details of the palace.

Two houses are in view here and an emphatic contrast is made between them in First Kings. Solomon spent much more time building his own house or palace complex than he did building God's house, another indication of his divided heart. In fact the two houses formed a single complex once completed.

To get to the new quarter that Solomon built from the old city of David, one had to pass through the gate in the northern Davidic city wall. Going in a northerly direction, the new complex consisted of an entrance hall, the so-called Hall of Pillars; the House of the Forest of Lebanon; the porch; the king's house; and the house of his wife, Pharaoh's daughter. See the image below.



Solomon's Temple and Palace Complex

<sup>2</sup> Solomon conscripted seventy thousand labourers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, with three thousand six hundred to oversee them.

## 2 Chronicles 2:2

Solomon conscripted seventy thousand labourers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, with three thousand six hundred to oversee them. Solomon used the forced labour of Canaanites living in the land for the construction work. In keeping with an ancient practice of controlling enemies, Solomon drafted the descendants of the Canaanites into forced labour for his construction projects throughout the nation. According to 1 Kings 5:13-18, Solomon imposed a less rigorous demand on the Israelites.

Elsewhere, in 1 Kings 5:16, only three thousand three hundred supervisors are recorded. Most commentators believe that the Chronicler's version is more accurate in this regard.

Rabbi Louis Ginzberg relates some of the legends surrounding the building of the temple. "During the seven years it took to build the Temple, not a single workman died who was employed about it, nor even did a single one fall sick. And as the workmen were sound and robust from first to last, so the perfection of their tools remained unimpaired until the building stood complete. Thus the work suffered no sort of interruption." There is, however, no scriptural or historic record available to support such a legend.

### II.f.iv 2 Chronicles 2:3-18 - Alliance with Hiram of Tyre

King Hiram of Tyre had always been at peace with David and had supplied him with timber for the building of his palaces. Now Solomon also turns to him and comes to an agreement regarding the supply of materials and labour for the building project. The Chapter concludes with further details of a census taken with regard to foreigners living in Israel who would be used as conscripted labour.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon sent word to King Hiram of Tyre: 'Once you dealt with my father David and sent him cedar to build himself a house to live in. <sup>4</sup> I am now about to build a house for the name of the Lord my God and dedicate it to him for offering fragrant incense before him, and for the regular offering of the rows of bread, and for burnt-offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths and the new moons and the appointed festivals of the Lord our God, as ordained for ever for Israel. <sup>5</sup> The house that I am about to build will be great, for our God is greater than other gods. <sup>6</sup> But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him? Who am I to build a house for him, except as a place to make offerings before him?

## 2 Chronicles 2:3-6

Solomon sent word to King Hiram of Tyre. Solomon's letter to Hiram, who had earlier assisted David; 1 Chronicles 14:1, is considerably expanded from 1 Kings 5:3-6 to describe the purpose of the temple for regular and seasonal worship according to the Law of Moses, to express the supremacy and transcendence of Israel's God, and to request a skilled craftsman (v.7), along with different kinds of timber.

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.

Once you dealt with my father David. Solomon appealed to Hiram based on his prior good relationship with his father David. This shows that David did not regard every neighbouring nation as an enemy. David wisely built alliances and friendships with neighbouring nations, and the benefit of this also came to Solomon.

Heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him. Although God will dwell in the temple, it is not to be thought of as the only place where God is, but as a special place where his name is, a place toward which his eyes are open: <<*Thus says the Lord: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting-place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word. Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being; whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever presents a grain-offering, like one who offers swine's blood; whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol*>> (Isaiah 66:1-3a). Paul agrees with Solomon as he addresses the Areopagus 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).

<sup>7</sup> So now send me an artisan skilled to work in gold, silver, bronze, and iron, and in purple, crimson, and blue fabrics, trained also in engraving, to join the skilled workers who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom my father David provided. <sup>8</sup> Send me also cedar, cypress, and algum timber from Lebanon, for I know that your servants are skilled in cutting Lebanon timber. My servants will work with your servants <sup>9</sup> to prepare timber for me in abundance, for the house I am about to build will be great and wonderful. <sup>10</sup> I will provide for your servants, those who cut the timber, twenty thousand cors of crushed

wheat, twenty thousand cors of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil.’

### 2 Chronicles 2:7-10

So now send me an artisan skilled to work in gold. The Hebrew for skilled, *khakam*, also means wise. Its use here consciously echoes Solomon’s request for wisdom in 2 Chronicles 1:10, and the wisdom and knowledge Solomon needs for building the temple. The skills called for here recall Oholiab’s work on the tabernacle, under the direction of Bezalel; refer to Exodus 31:1-11.

Solomon wanted the temple to be the best it could be, so he used Gentile labour when it was better. This 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 for Israel alone: *<<I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations>> (Isaiah 42:6), and: <<Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith>> (Romans 3:29-30).*

Despite a growing number of skilled craftsmen in Israel, their techniques remained inferior to those of their northern neighbours, as is demonstrated archaeologically by less finely cut building stones and by the lower level of Israelite culture in general. The Sidonians were particularly noted as timber craftsmen in the ancient world, a fact substantiated on the famous Palmyra Stone. Its inscription from 2200 BC tells of 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 for enduring quality.

Send me also cedar, cypress, and algum timber from Lebanon. The cedar trees of Lebanon were legendary for their excellent timber and are often used as analogies of strength and beautiful form: *<<The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon>> (Psalm 92:12), <<His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars>> (Song 5:15), and: <<Consider Assyria, a cedar of Lebanon, with fair branches and forest shade, and of great height, its top among the clouds>> (Ezekiel 31:3).* This means Solomon wanted to build the temple out of the best and most beautiful materials possible.

<sup>11</sup> Then King Hiram of Tyre answered in a letter that he sent to Solomon, ‘Because the Lord loves his people he has made you king over

them.’<sup>12</sup> Hiram also said, ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, who has given King David a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, who will build a temple for the Lord, and a royal palace for himself.

### 2 Chronicles 2:11-12

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth. Hiram’s letter of reply includes a Gentile’s acknowledgment of Yahweh as Creator, and of God’s gift of wisdom to Solomon, which is especially focused on the task of temple building; refer to the comments made on 1 Kings 5:9-12. It cannot be said that Hiram was a saved man, but he certainly respected the God of Israel. This was no doubt due to David’s godly influence on Hiram.

<sup>13</sup> ‘I have dispatched Hiram-abi, a skilled artisan, endowed with understanding,<sup>14</sup> the son of one of the Danite women, his father a Tyrian. He is trained to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and in purple, blue, and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and to do all sorts of engraving and execute any design that may be assigned him, with your artisans, the artisans of my lord, your father David.<sup>15</sup> Now, as for the wheat, barley, oil, and wine, of which my lord has spoken, let him send them to his servants.<sup>16</sup> 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 2:13-16

Hiram-abi is likened to Oholiab since the mothers of both men are said to be descended from Dan, while Solomon the temple builder is implicitly compared to Bezalel, who directed the building of the tabernacle. Refer to Exodus 31:6 and the comment made on 1 Kings 7:13-14.

Now, as for the wheat, barley, oil, and wine, of which my lord has spoken, let him send them to his servants. Hiram agreed to work for the arrangement suggested by Solomon, although he could have asked for more; refer to 1 Kings 5:6. This shows that Hiram did expect to be paid. His service and the service of his people were not a gift or a sacrifice.

**Hiram calls Solomon ‘my lord’ and refers to himself as a servant. However, this does not mean that Hiram was subordinate to Solomon for this was the language of diplomacy.**

The reference to Joppa, which is not mentioned in 1 Kings 5:9, may reflect: *<<So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to*

*the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from King Cyrus of Persia>> (Ezra 3:7). Timber from Lebanon for the second temple was floated to that port.*



The map shows Tyre and Sidon in relation to Jaffa, modern day Joppa and Jerusalem

<sup>17</sup> Then Solomon took a census of all the aliens who were residing in the land of Israel, after the census that his father David had taken; and there were found to be one hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred. <sup>18</sup> Seventy thousand of them he assigned as labourers, eighty thousand as stonecutters in the hill country, and three thousand six hundred as overseers to make the people work.

2 Chronicles 2:17-18

Then Solomon took a census of all the aliens who were residing in the land of Israel. This is not an illegal census like the one taken by David because that was to innumerate Israel’s fighting strength. Here, Solomon wanted to know how many

foreigners he could conscript as a labour force. It also clarifies the statement made about a conscripted workforce in v.2.

**When Jesus cleared the temple almost one thousand years later he said: <<Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations”? But you have made it a den of robbers>> (Mark 11:17). By using foreign workers in its construction it shows that it was actually ‘a house of prayer for all the nations’ from the outset, as the Lord himself later confirms: <<And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples>> (Isaiah 56:6-7).**