
Though Solomon’s remarkable building projects became world famous, they created serious problems in his own kingdom. He taxed the people heavily and used forced labor to complete his massive projects. The people began to complain, and a deep resentment, especially in the northern tribes, began to fester.

“The life of the common man had been disrupted. In the past, a man’s wealth had been calculated mostly by the land he owned, the number of flocks he had and the size of his family. Solomon’s sweeping economic changes altered that system. Land was no longer of supreme importance—in fact, it may have become somewhat of a burden. The more land a man owned, the more crops he could grow, and thus the more he would have to turn over to the king’s officers when collection time came around every 12 months. Likewise, flocks were surrendered to tax collectors and sons were forced to serve one month of every three in the king’s labor force.

“Now wealth was calculated not by property ownership but by the amount of money a man controlled. Certainly more and more money in gold and silver came into Israel every year, but very little of it ever filtered down to the average Israelite, who had to surrender so much of his livelihood to the king’s coffers. Instead, the money was used to pay growing international debts, salaries for the full-time government officials, commissions to merchants and artisans in the king’s employ, temple and palace upkeep and other expenses.

“For the first time in Israel’s history, there began to be a distinct difference between ‘rich’ and ‘poor.’ The king and his household were rich; the common people were poor. In between were the salaried civil servants and the merchants and artisans, many of whom organized craft guilds by that time. Such class separations had not been known in the Israel where a shepherd boy like David could be anointed king—only 50 years earlier.” (Great People of the Bible, pp. 192–93.)

1 Kings 9:26–28. Israel’s Navy

Hiram’s people, the Phoenicians, were masters of the sea, whereas the Israelites were not. First Kings 9:26–28 indicates that Hiram’s servants taught Solomon’s men the seafaring trade. As a result, Solomon was able to secure gold from Ophir (thought to be a port in southern Arabia) to be used to build the temple. (See also 1 Kings 10:23.)

1 Kings 10:1. Where Was the Queen of Sheba From?

It is very likely that the woman was a Sabean from Arabia near the southern end of the Red Sea (see Clarke, Commentary, 2:421). Three proofs are offered: (1) the area in which the Sabians lived is known to have abounded in riches and spices; (2) many ancient writers refer to the gold and silver mines of Saba; and (3) the Sabians had women rather than men for their rulers.

1 Kings 10:19. What Were the Stays Attached to the Throne?

The description here indicates that the throne was similar to a round-topped, two-armed chair. The stays, or hands, were armrests on which the king could lean.

1 Kings 10:23–29. Solomon’s Wealth

These verses sum up the tremendous wealth Solomon had amassed. Part of his wealth came through trading and international commerce, but much of it came through the economic oppression of the people.