

## ארמון המלך

### אבנר רמו



Hechal Shlomo - The Jewish heritage center in Jerusalem

In the Book of Deuteronomy we read about the Mosaic Law regarding the future Israelite kings:  
שום תשים עליך מלך אשר יבחר יהוה אלהיך בו: מקרב אחיך תשים עליך מלך-לא תוכל לתת  
עליך איש נכרי אשר לא-אחיך הוא.  
רק לא-ירבה-לו סוסים, ולא-ישיב את-העם מצרימה, למען הרבות סוס; ויהוה אמר לכם, לא  
תספון לשוב בדרך הזה עוד.  
ולא ירבה-לו נשים, ולא יסור לבבו; וכסף וזהב לא ירבה-לו מאד.  
והיה כשבתו, על כסא ממלכתו-וכתב לו את-משנה התורה הזאת על-ספר, מלפני הכהנים  
הלויים.  
והיתה עמו, וקרא בו כל-ימי חייו-למען ילמד ליראה את-יהוה אלהיו, לשמר את-כל-דברי  
התורה הזאת ואת-החקים האלה לעשתם.  
לבלתי רום-לבבו מאחיו, ולבלתי סור מן-המצוה ימין ושמאל

“You shall in any wise set him king over you, whom *YHWH* your God shall choose; one from among your brethren shall you set king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.

Only he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses; forasmuch as *YHWH* had said to you: You shall henceforth return no more that way.

Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

And it shall be, when he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites.

And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear *YHWH* his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them;

**That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left” (Deu 17:15-20).**

There is not a single word for or against building a royal palace. Even when the Prophet Samuel tells the Israelites about the many drawbacks of appointing a king over the people, he does not relate to such a possibility (1 Sam 8:11-17).

In fact, we never hear that any of the Israelite leaders (not even King Saul) prior to David, had a house built personally for them.

In the Book of Samuel we read a somewhat odd report:

**וישלח חירם מלך-צר מלאכים אל-דוד, ועצי ארזים וחרשי עץ וחרשי אבן קיר; ויבנו-בית לדוד.**

**“And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar-trees, and carpenters, and masons; and they built David a house” (2 Sam 5:11; see also: 1 Ch 14:1).**

No further details are known about this transaction. There is also no information about the measures of this royal palace or about its ornaments, or about the length of time that it took to complete it. Yet for accommodating David’s ten wives and their many children it must have been quite a spacious house.

We read in the Book of Samuel:

**ויהי לעת הערב, ויקם דוד מעל משכבו ויתהלך על-גג בית-המלך, וירא אשה רחצת, מעל הגג; “And it came to pass at eventide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing” (2 Sam 11:2).**

This viewing point of David suggests that the royal palace must have been higher than most of the houses of Jerusalem of that time. The lofty and sturdy roof of the royal palace also played a role In Absalom’s revolt against his father:

**ויטו לאבשלום האהל על-הגג; ויבא אבשלום אל-פלגשי אביו, לעיני כל-ישראל. “So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel” (2 Sam 16:22).**

In the Book of Kings we read:

**ויתחתן שלמה את-פרעה מלך מצרים; ויקח את-בת-פרעה ויביאה אל-עיר דוד, עד כלתו לבנות את-ביתו ואת-בית יהוה, ואת-חומת ירושלם סביב. “And Solomon became allied to Pharaoh king of Egypt by marriage, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of YHWH, and the wall of Jerusalem round about” (1 Ki 3:1).**

In spite of the presence of other information (1 Ki 7:1), the Greek translator added to this verse: “In seven years he made and finished them.”

We do not know why King Solomon was determined to build a new royal palace, and we never hear again about the palace that served King David.

In the Book of Kings we read how some of the building stones were obtained:

**ויהי לשלמה שבעים אלף נשא סבל; ושמונים אלף חצב בהר.  
לבד משרי הנצבים לשלמה אשר על-המלאכה, שלשת אלפים ושלש מאות-הרדים בעם,  
העשים במלאכה.**

**ויצו המלך ויסעו אבנים גדלות אבנים יקרות ליסד הבית-אבני גזית.**

**“And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bore burdens, and fourscore thousand that were hewers in the mountains;**

**Besides Solomon's chief officers that were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, who bore rule over the people that wrought in the work.**

**And the king commanded, and they quarried great stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation of the house with hewn stone” (1 Ki 5:29-31; see also: 2 Ch 2:1).**

Although, it is not specified here for which house these stones were destined, we read two chapters later that for the building of Solomon palace they employed:

**אבנים יקרת כמדות גזית, מגורות במגרה מבית ומחוץ; וממסד עד-הטפחות,**

**“All these were of costly stones, according to the measures of hewn stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation to the coping” (1 Ki 7:9).**

On the other hand, we read that the stones utilized for building Solomon's God's house were:

**אבן-שלמה מסע** - **“stone made ready at the quarry”** (1 Ki 6:7). Unlike the English translation here that has nothing in common with the Hebrew, the Greek translator wrote: “rough, unworked stones.”

While the stones utilized to build God's house were five, six, and seven cubits wide (1 Ki 6:6), those employed for the building the palace were eight and ten cubits wide (1 Ki 7:10).

We read about Salomon's palace: **מאה אמה ארכו וחמשים אמה רחבו, ושלשים אמה קומתו** -

**“The length thereof was a hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits” (1 Ki 7:2).**

The length and the breadth of this building happened to be the same as those of Moses' tabernacle's court (Ex 27:9-18). The floor area of the palace was four times greater than that of the house that Solomon built for God (1 Ki 6:2). Both houses were of the same height.

Although we are told that about one third of the palace space was allocated to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Ki 7:8), it seems odd that the quarters of the unnamed daughter of Pharaoh were larger by 25% than the area that Solomon dedicated to the name of *YHWH*.



**The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon', oil on canvas painting by Edward Poynter, 1890**

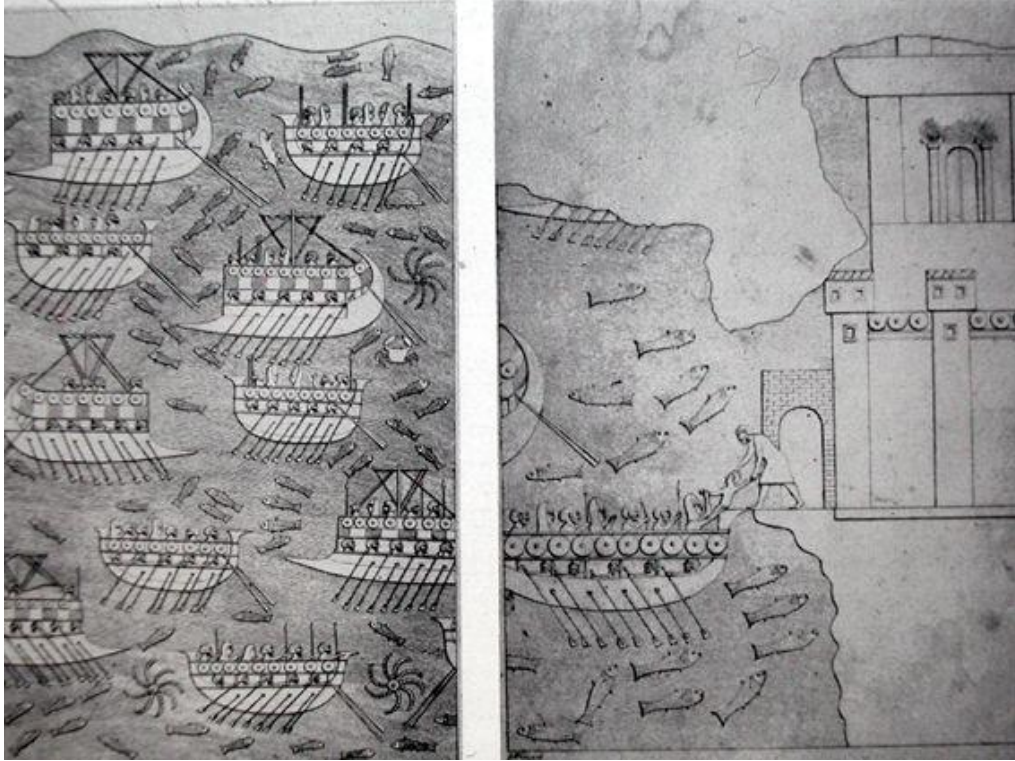
The hall in front of God's house measured twenty by ten cubits (1 Ki 6:3), while in front of Solomon's palace: **ואת אולם העמודים עשה, חמשים אמה ארכו, ושלשים אמה רחבו - And he made the hall of pillars: the length thereof was fifty cubits, and the breadth thereof thirty cubits**" (1 Ki 7:6).

Even if the hall in front of Solomon's palace served as a hall of justice (1 Ki 7:7), it seems more than little ostentatious to be seven and a half fold greater than the hall leading to Solomon's God's house.

While both Solomon's house of God and his palace apparently had a court (1 Ki 6:36; 7:12), it is only the palace court that is described as: **וחצר הגדולה סביב - "And the great court round about"** (1 Ki 7:12; see also: 1 Ki 7:9).

It is therefore not surprising that while it took seven (and a half) years to complete God's house (1 Ki 6:1, 37-38), we read: **ואת-ביתו בנה שלמה שלש עשרה שנה; ויכל את-כל-ביתו - "And Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished his entire house"** (1 Ki 7:1).

In the next verse we read: **ויבן את-בית יער הלבנון - "And he built the house of the forest of Lebanon"** (1 Ki 7:2). The grammar of this statement led some readers to believe that this was another building. Yet it is odd that the biblical text does not explain the function of this elaborate and costly building. Furthermore, unlike Solomon's house for God and the royal palace, the fate of this structure is not known.



Assyrian relief describing Luli King of Tyre-Sidon fleeing to Cyprus while his city is besieged by the Assyrian King Sennachrib in 701 BC. Notice the shields decorating his palace.

In regard to this edifice we read:

ויעש המלך שלמה מאתים צנה, זהב שחוט; שש-מאות זהב יעלה על-הצנה האחת.  
ושלש-מאות מגנים, זהב שחוט-שלשת מנים זהב יעלה על-המגן האחת; ויתנם המלך בית  
יער הלבנון.

“And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred shekels of gold went to one target.

And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold: three pounds of gold went to one shield; and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon” (1 Ki 10:16-17).

ויהי בשנה החמישית למלך רחבעם; עלה שושק (שישק) מלך-מצרים על-ירושלם.  
ויקח את-אצרות בית-יהוה, ואת-אוצרות בית המלך, ואת-הכל לקח; ויקח את-כל-מגני  
הזהב אשר עשה שלמה.  
ויעש המלך רחבעם תחתם מגני נחשת;

“And in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem;

And he took away the treasures of the house of YHWH, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all; and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

And king Rehoboam made in their stead shields of brass” (1 Ki 14:25-27).

As Solomon's gold shields were taken from the king's house (no mention here of "the house of the forest of Lebanon"), we may conclude that **“And he built the house of the forest of Lebanon”** should be understood as a misspelled: **“And he built his house with Lebanon's forest's trees”** - **ויבן את-ביתו בעצי יער הלבנון**

It seems that the pious Chronicler realized that the building projects of Solomon were an expression of his personal self-appreciation and of his disrespectful attitude toward *YHWH*. Therefore while the Chronicler writes a modified description of God's house that was built by Solomon (2 Ch 3:1-15), all that he had to say about Solomon's palace was:

**ויכל שלמה את-בית יהוה ואת-בית המלך; ואת כל-הבא על-לב שלמה לעשות בבית-יהוה ובביתו-הצליח.**

**“And Solomon finished the house of *YHWH*, and the king's house; and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of *YHWH*, and in his own house, he prosperously effected”** (2 Ch 7:11).

**ויהי מקץ עשרים שנה, אשר בנה שלמה את-בית יהוה-ואת-ביתו.**

**“And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the house of *YHWH*, and his own house”** (2 Ch 8:1; see also: 1 Ki 9:10).

The Chronicler writing reflected the enduring centrality of the house of God for the Israelites. They preferred to remember Solomon as its founder rather than as a self-aggrandizing tyrant who enslaved many of his people for building himself a palace much greater than the dwelling that he dedicated to God.

It seems that even the writer of the Book of Kings (or a late scribe) who read verses 1 Ki 5:27-30, was troubled by this information, and he therefore added:

**ואת כל-ערי המסכנות אשר היו לשלמה, ואת ערי הרכב, ואת ערי הפרשים; ואת חשק שלמה אשר חשק לבנות בירושלם ובלבנון ובכל ארץ ממשלתו.**  
**כל-העם הנותר מן-האמרי החתי הפרזי החוי והיבوسی, אשר לא-מבני ישראל המה.**  
**בניהם, אשר נתרו אחריהם בארץ, אשר לא-יכלו בני ישראל להחרים; ויעלם שלמה למס-עבד, עד היום הזה.**  
**ומבני ישראל לא-נתן שלמה עבד: כי-הם אנשי המלחמה, ועבדיו ושריו ושלישיו, ושרי רכבו ופרשיו.**  
**אלה שרי הנצבים אשר על-המלאכה לשלמה, חמשים וחמש מאות-הרדים בעם העשים במלאכה.**

**“And all the store-cities that Solomon had, and the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build for his pleasure in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.**

**All the people that were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the children of Israel;**

**Even their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel were not able utterly to destroy, of them did Solomon raise a levy of bondservants, to this day.**

**But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondservants; but they were the men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots and of his horsemen.**

**These were the chief officers that were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, who bore rule over the people that wrought in the work” (1 Ki 9:19-23).**

If this addition was genuine we would not have read in the same book that after Solomon’ death “all Israel” came to his son saying:

**אביך הקשה את-עלנו; ואתה עתה הקל מעבדת אביך הקשה, ומעלו הכבד אשר-נתן עלינו-ונעבדך.**

**“Your father made our yoke grievous; now therefore make you the grievous service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve you” (1 Ki 12:4).**