

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 29

Solomon – Part One

Hebrew review *Aleph - Cheyt*

During the last week, an editorial appeared in the Jerusalem Post entitled, “Another Unexpected Surprise from the Egyptian Revolution.” The subtitle was,

Rare artifacts have now resurfaced 35 years after they were excavated from the Sinai by Israeli archeologists and handed over to Egypt.

The article’s author, Hershel Shanks, is the founding editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, the world’s largest-circulation magazine devoted to biblical archaeology.

The article gives some of the history of the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement, including the surrender by Israel to Egypt of some archaeological finds from excavations in the Sinai region. Among these artifacts was a large storage vessel, over three feet high, with an inscription around the jar that refers to “Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah.”

This jar was part of the finds from an 8th century BC site around Kuntillet Ajrud, and was surrendered to Egypt in the 1979 peace accord. Shanks believed that after being tendered to Egypt, the finds were never seen or referenced in Egypt again.¹ Shanks was in Egypt just ten days before the protest erupted recently, and asked the Egyptian director of the antiquities council what happened to the artifacts. The director claimed not to know, promising to find out.

Soon that director resigned as part of the government shakeup without having gotten back to Shanks on the artifacts’ whereabouts. The press reported that in addition to protests, the civil unrest included looting of many Egyptian archaeological treasures. Shanks wondered if the looting included these never

¹ Egyptologist James Hoffmeier, who reads these lessons in help and support of this class, noted that Shanks was not fully informed on what had happened. While Shanks thought the artifacts disappeared, it is not the full story. Hoffmeier notes,

The Egyptians built a special, secure storage facility in Qantara East in Sinai for the objects and I have been in it many times over the past decade. Additionally, a complete inventory was made of every object and they were registered into the SCA (Supreme Council for Antiquities) system, and the artifacts (mostly pottery) were photographed digitally. I know this because I worked with the SCA inspectors who did this... All of this was done at the direction of Dr. Mohamed Abd el-Maksoud. Zahi Hawass simply does not care about such trivialities, and was either ignorant or could care less.

seen again items, but was unable to find out. Then on March 3, the press reported that Egypt had moved 30 truckloads of treasures into safekeeping. Reportedly among these were “Sinai artifacts that were retrieved from Israel following the signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty.”

Shanks closed his op-ed noting that, while the world now knows where the artifacts remain, the issue is whether they will ever be exhibited, so that the world can see them.

This article was sent to me by Weston Fields, Director of the Dead Sea Scrolls Foundation, and class-supporter (one of the 50 people who review these lessons for accuracy and ideas.) Weston also happens to know Esther Eshel, one of the two Israeli specialists who are charged with publishing the inscriptions from these artifacts.

Recognizing the relevance of the find to our class, Weston contacted Ms. Eshel to get the precise inscription. The inscription, as sent to Weston and then forwarded to me, reads:

1. אמר
2. אמריו א
3. מר ל.אדני
4. השלם. את.
5. ברכתך. לי
6. הוה תמן
7. ולאשרתה. יב
8. רך וישמרך
9. ויהי עם. אדנ
10. ין]

As a reminder, last week our class used our knowledge of the first eight letters of the Hebrew alphabet to discuss Solomon’s temple, known in Scripture as the

“house of YHWH.” We have covered three of YHWH’s four letters, missing only the “Y” (*yodh*). In light of our class last week, Weston tested me, posing the question, “Where in the inscription does it say, “YHWH”?”

For those of you who have done your homework, the answer is easily found on line six. In fact, the answer is more easily found on line six for our class than it might be for some who know all the Hebrew letters! The reason why, is that in this inscription, the one letter in YHWH we have yet to learn (the “Y”) is missing in the inscription! So the letters HWH (*hey vav hey*) are there, but the first letter is missing.

.6 הוה תמן

If we transpose these Hebrew letters into English they form two words:
hvh tmn.
The word *hvh* is *YHVH* with the “Y” missing. The next word is “*Teman*”

The text in lines 5-7 could be translated, “I bless you [in the name of] YHWH of Teman and his Asherah.” Setting aside the location of Teman², we see the interesting idea of YHWH and “his Asherah.” In his Op-Ed, Shanks notes the scholastic division over whether the “Asherah” is a reference to a goddess seen to serve as consort to YHWH³, or simply to a tree that served as a representation of YHWH.⁴

It seems more probable to me (admittedly a rank amateur) that Asherah refers to the goddess. Either way, the inscription gives a snapshot view into the life of the Israelites during the time of the monarchy. The snapshot view is very consistent

² In Scripture, we read of Teman and the Temanites. See, e.g., 1 Chron. 1:45, Job 2:11, Jer. 49:20

³ A number of scholars like to point out the supposed error in the Bible’s portrayal of Israel as monotheistic, showing the archaeological findings that Asherah was worshipped as the consort or wife of Yahweh. There are books and articles written about God having a wife in Old Testament practice. Rob McCray, who reads these lesson in support of this class, related a reaction of his father, John McCray, Rob’s father who is a well-respected and published Biblical archaeologist to a lecture by Bill Dever, also a well-published and fairly renown archaeologist specializing in matters related to the Bible. As Rob tells the story:

Years ago my father and I heard Dever at an archaeology conference deliver a lesson on whether the Israelites were monotheists. His thesis was that archaeology has proven that the Hebrew Bible is incorrect in presenting the Israelites as monotheistic. Dever argued that the evidence shows that the people inhabiting the land were always polytheistic. I remember my father and I having the same reaction: “what Bible is he reading?” The Biblical narrative in fact shows that while Moses, Joshua, the prophets, and a handful of kings were monotheistic, the people never really were, at least not for any significant period of time. Archaeology in fact confirms the narrative on this point. Dever had built a straw man which served his own desire to discredit the Bible.”

⁴ The Hebrew *’ashur* means a “cedar tree,” and an “asherah” references a living tree or a sacred pole used as an object of worship.

with Scripture which notes problems the Israelites had with both planting a tree (*asherah*) as part of the worship of YHWH (see, e.g., Dt. 16:21) and worshipping Asherah as a female counterpart goddess to YHWH.

This artifact dates from the era around the reign of Jezebel who, according to the Bible, venerated Asherah as the consort of Baal. We read of Elijah calling out the prophets of these idols:

...you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table (1 Kings 18:19).

This worship of Asherah as goddess did not originate with Jezebel. It had a long history in the worship of Canaanites and others in the Ancient Near East, far predating the arrival of Israel into the Promised Land.

We can go back to Solomon, son of David, and read of his sin worshipping the goddess Ashtoreth (an alternate name for Asherah). In 1 Kings, 11:4-6 we read,

For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done.

What happened? What could make a good wise king go so bad? We ask this as we study the story of Solomon this week.

SOLOMON'S RISE TO POWER

Solomon's rise to power was not a peaceful affair. We are told about it in 1 Kings 1 and 2. As David aged, he reached a point where he was constantly cold. In an effort to generate some body heat, his servants found a beautiful young woman, "Abishag the Shunamite," and added her as a consort to King David. The plan was that Abishag would provide David with physical companionship that would finally bring him physical warmth.

The Scripture writes of this planned liaison discreetly, not luridly. Still the message is clear. Abishag was brought to David to provide a sexual encounter, but David "knew her not" (1 Kings 1:4). This indication of impotence seems to be the final impetus for David's son Adonijah to claim the throne.

Adonijah “exalted himself” (never a good thing!) and gathered chariots, horsemen, and “50 men to run before him.” He enlisted the support of the military man Joab, as well as the priest Abiathar. He then went right outside Jerusalem to sacrifice animals and set himself up as king. Adonijah invited all his brothers and the royal officials of Judah, except for Solomon and several others very loyal to David. An innuendo is made to the effect that Adonijah’s rebellion was due, in some measure, to David’s failure as a parent to discipline Adonijah (“His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’” 1 Kings 1:6).

Nathan the prophet hears of Adonijah’s bold move and goes to Bathsheba. After telling Bathsheba what was happening, and clearly communicating that Adonijah’s success would mean the end for Solomon and likely Bathsheba as well, Nathan submits a plan. Bathsheba would go to David and remind him of his assurance that Solomon would follow him on the throne, asking why Adonijah had made himself king instead. After that, Nathan was going to come in and tell David what Adonijah was doing.

Things go according to plan, and David declared again his assurance that Solomon was the next monarch. Calling in Zadok (the priest left out by Adonijah), Nathan the prophet (also excluded by Adonijah) and Benaiah (yet another key man left off Adonijah’s invitation list), David instructed them to set Solomon on David’s own mule. Solomon was to be anointed king at the local spring of Gihon. Then with trumpet blasting, the shout was to go up, “Long live King Solomon!” David’s final instruction in this regard was to lead Solomon back to the throne and set Solomon on it as king.

The men did as David instructed taking with them the mercenary guards of David (the “Cherethites and Pelethites” 1 Kings 1:38). The actions had the expected effect on the citizenry of Jerusalem who took up the party atmosphere of the trumpets and shouting:

And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise (1 Kings 1:40).

Adonijah was close enough by with his own planned coup, that he and his invited guests heard the celebrations. Word comes in that, “our lord King David has made Solomon king.” Added to the story was the retinue of prophet, priest, and mercenary soldiers, the ride on King David’s mule, the anointing, and the actual sitting on the throne.

This put a real damper on Adonijah’s coming-out party! The invited guests begin to slip away, realizing they were suddenly attending a party of treason. Adonijah himself saw the precarious situation and ran to the altar of YHWH, holding on to

the horns of the altar. Evidently this was some cultural idea that someone would hesitate to kill anyone who was at a key worship sight.⁵

Solomon sent word that no harm would come to his brother as long as his brother did not work toward another coup. Adonijah accepted Solomon's representations and came to Solomon bowing in homage.

The story then shifts back to David, who called Solomon in and gave him final instructions on what to do once David passed. There were a number of people whom David had failed to deal with, yet who had committed deeds worthy of capital punishment. David gave that information to Solomon with the implicit instruction to carry out the appropriate punishments. David then "slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10).⁶

After David died, Adonijah's ambition trumped his better judgment and he plotted to position himself for another coup. Adonijah goes to Bathsheba with a pretty poor story, which, evidently she bought! Bathsheba begins on her guard at being approached by Adonijah, but once he assures her he was coming in peace, she listened to his plea. Adonijah said,

You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel fully expected me to reign. However, the kingdom has turned about and become my brother's, for it was his from the LORD. And now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me (1 Kings 2:15-16).

Adonijah's one request was that Bathsheba persuade Solomon to give David's last female companion, young Abishag, to Adonijah.

This seems a smart ploy. One might suspect that Bathsheba, as a favored wife of David, was no great fan of Abishag who was seen as a more interesting sexual companion for David in his old age. But the plan backfired.

Bathsheba made Adonijah's pitch as her own request, but Solomon immediately saw it for what it was, a posturing of Adonijah as David's true successor.⁷

⁵ In Exodus 21:12-14 and Numbers 35, the law set out rules concerning cities of refuge. These were places where someone who non-intentionally killed another could flee to escape revenge killing long enough for a fair trial. The Exodus account implies that an innocent accused of murder would likely have fled to the Lord's altar, and should not be pried away unless guilty.

⁶ It is worth noting that the phrase "slept with his fathers" as a means of describing death does not unfold a full understanding of the afterlife. Still it does indicate the idea of awakening from death, as one awakens from sleep.

⁷ Reviewing this lesson, Egyptologist and archaeologist Hoffmeier added,

Adonijah's request for Abishag, in keeping with ANE ["Ancient Near East"] practice, was trying to secure his claim to the throne by marriage to David's concubine (a daughter

Adonijah would be the viral one who took the woman first given to the aged and impotent king. Solomon saw the treason and had Adonijah put to death. Solomon then dealt with the co-conspirators of Adonijah as well as the men David had assigned for punishment.

At this point the Solomon story transitions, for now “the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (1 Kings 2:46).

POINT FOR HOME

“Adonijah exalted himself, saying, ‘I will be king.’” (1 Kings 1:5).

Adonijah’s name means “Yahweh is my Lord.”⁸ Yet Adonijah never lived up to his name. Compare Adonijah’s actions attempting to be king with those of David. David refused to lift a hand against Saul. Even after Samuel anointed David king, David let God and Saul run their course and never sought the throne by his own actions or manipulations. Even as king, David was amazed and thankful that God had brought him so far into a position of honor and service. David was not perfect, but David sought to live his life with Yahweh as his Lord.

Adonijah, on the other hand, exalted himself, not Yahweh. Adonijah sought the kingship at a time when his father was deemed too weak to contest the coup. Adonijah sought the title, maneuvered for the title, and then, feigning subjugation, manipulated for the title. There is an inherent conflict in the phrase, “Adonijah exalted himself.” If, as his name claimed, Yahweh was his Lord, then Adonijah would have exalted Yahweh. Adonijah merely wore the name of Yahweh as Lord; he did not live it.

would have worked too which may explain Amnon's tryst or rape of Tamar, Absalom's sister). The practice of marrying close to the king is why Saul reneged on allowing David to marry his eldest daughter after killing Goliath, and offers #2 daughter (less status), and still hoped David would be killed going after the 100 Philistines! And this explains why Saul annulled David and Michal's marriage when David had to flee the court. The importance of marrying into the previous royal family is why David made the return of Michal as a term of surrender and peace from Abner (2 Sam 3:12-16). So Adonijah knew what he was asking for and why, so did Solomon. I have always wondered why Bathsheba acted like she was so clueless. Your suggestion of jealousy makes good womanly sense. Did she not know she was jeopardizing her son Solomon's kingship? The Egyptians were big into marrying within the royal family to secure succession and marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh could help legitimate a non-royal person or one not in the line of succession.

⁸ The -jah ending on Adonijah’s name is the abbreviation for Yahweh. As noted last week, the Hebrew “y” is sometimes given an English “J” in translation. In Hebrew, the name is *Adoni – yah*.

Where does this sit with us? Believers in Christ wear the name as Christians. One of the oldest anthems in the church is the proclamation that Jesus is Lord. Is it a phrase? Is “Christian” a label? Or do we mean it enough to live it?

SOLOMON AND WISDOM

Scripture tells us that “Solomon loved Yahweh” (1 Kings 3:3), and we read of some wonderful things about Solomon in that regard. Yet Solomon had some serious flaws too.

Over and over we read wonderful things about Solomon only to be followed or interspersed with subtly negative and, at times, openly appalling things. For example, the verse cited above notes “Solomon loved the Lord,” but then continues by noting Solomon walked “in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places.” It does not say that Solomon was devoted or walking in the statutes of Yahweh, but rather of “David his father.” Then it adds that even in following his father, Solomon was erring by sacrificing at high places. This lack of understanding on the time, place, and purpose of sacrifice will unravel not only Solomon’s faith and walk, but ultimately the unity of the kingdom under his sons.

Another really strong positive about Solomon is that, when God appeared in a dream and offered Solomon the gift of his choice, Solomon chose wisdom. God noted the selflessness, humility and love for others shown by Solomon’s choice. God then offered more than wisdom, and gave Solomon fame, wealth, power, and an enlarged kingdom. The wisdom of Solomon is still remembered today among the faithful and the pagan alike. The story of Solomon deciding which prostitute truly was mother to the child put awe in the hearts of the people then just as it does today. (The lawyer in me also notes in amazement that Solomon as king gave a full and fair hearing to two prostitutes deciding between them who had rights to the undoubtedly illegitimate child. The American term for that is “justice for all.”)

Solomon built the house of Yahweh (the temple). This was a move of holiness and respect, not only for Yahweh, but for David as well. Yet even as that story is told, it is interrupted in the middle for a telling insertion. In 1 Kings 6 Solomon spends a lot of money and seven years building the temple. The last verse of 1 Kings 6 reads,

...the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it.

The story on the temple continues, but not in 7:1. There is an interruption that is set in 7:1-7:12, followed by the conclusion of the temple story. The insertion notes that Solomon spent thirteen years building his own house. After detailing

that project for 12 verses, the temple story is renewed talking about the furnishings in the temple and the opening celebrations. If we take out the number of the chapters and verses, we see the stark contrast of the Hebrew:

...the house [of Yahweh] was finished... He was seven years in building it. Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished his entire house (1 Kings 6:38, 7:1).

This is a subtle point in the Hebrew, but one that I think is intentional. Solomon spent nearly twice as much time on his own house as he did that of the Lord. Now if the contrast were not set in such immediate opposition to each other, I might think it merely that Solomon's house included governmental offices, etc. Or I might consider that Solomon was not willing to pay overtime for his own house as he did the Lord's. Yet the blatant contrast and insertion seems to point out something more. This is not the last time we will see Solomon seeking self interest and interest of his own house over that of the Lord's.

The rest of chapter seven and chapter eight of 1 Kings tells of Solomon finishing and then dedicating the temple. Solomon's prayer of dedication shows a great deal of devotion and wisdom. It is both thoughtful and moving:

- "O Yahweh, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to you keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart (v. 23).
- "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (v. 27).
- "Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive (v. 28-30).
- "Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant and to the plea of your people Israel, giving ear to them whenever they call to you" (v. 52).

After this wonderful public prayer, Solomon closed the ceremony with a benediction and charge to the people of Israel. Solomon blessed the people with the charge that the Lord might incline the peoples' hearts to him,

...to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers (v. 58).

Solomon then closes by admonishing the people to remember that,

Yahweh is God; there is no other. Let your heart therefore be wholly true to Yahweh our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day (v. 59-60).

Solomon's temple dedication was a certain high point, but one must contrast his charge that the people remember that "Yahweh is God" and "there is no other" with his actions. In chapter 11, verse 1, we are told, "King Solomon loved many foreign women." 1 Kings then points out that God had earlier instructed his people not to intermarry with non-Israelites. God warned that intermarriage with foreign women would lead the men away from true worship of Yahweh.

With Solomon's love of foreign women, the results fell just like dominoes. Solomon takes 700 wives and 300 concubines. Then as he aged, "his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to Yahweh his God" (1 Kings 11:4). The Hebrew is very precise here. Remember that back in 1 Kings 8, in Solomon's charge to the people after building the temple, he urged them,

Let your heart therefore be wholly true to Yahweh our God

Then here, because Solomon had fallen away from the Lord and spent his energy and time in intimacy and marriage with foreign women,

His heart was not wholly true to Yahweh his God.

The Hebrew phrasing and words mirror each other in the two passages. To further illustrate the contrast, Solomon's first use of the phrase in admonition to the people came after building the temple. In this second use of the phrase where Solomon himself falls short, it is immediately followed by Solomon worshipping the Ashtoreth and other foreign gods, building them places of worship as well.

As a result of Solomon's faithlessness to God, God tells Solomon that the kingdom will be ripped from his house, but not until his death. God promised to leave one tribe to Solomon's offspring, but the rest would be torn from his son's hands.

POINTS FOR HOME

"Solomon loved Yahweh" (1 Kings 3:3).

This story amazes me. Solomon had a genuine love for the Lord, but look what happened to him, and then to the history of Israel. This story reminds me of the

principle that Christ taught his followers: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mat. 6:21). Solomon invested his time, his energy, his love and his affection in foreign, pagan women. It is no surprise that over time, Solomon’s heart was wrapped up in those women and their interests, beliefs, and priorities. Solomon placed his personal treasures (investments) in these women and, just as Christ clearly taught, Solomon’s heart was there also.

This story also motivates me. I do not want to invest in things that draw me away from the Lord. I want to aim to seek his kingdom as my first priority, and trust that he will take care of the incidentals many call “life.” Dare we take a few minutes to prayerfully consider where we are investing our treasures and ourselves? Then maybe we can move deliberately back into prioritizing God’s kingdom work.

I do not want to grow old and have it said that my love for God grew cold. I pray that it will grow deeper and stronger everyday.

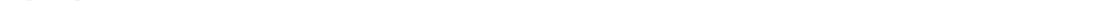
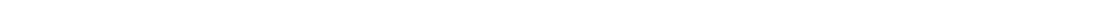
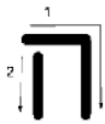
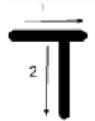
“Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians” (1 Kings. 11:5).

The Israelis find an old heavy stone jar. The jar dates from a century or two after Solomon. The jar has ancient scribbling that indicates worship of Yahweh, but also likely worship of Asherah. This sin of idolatry was not found only in the household of Solomon; it spread to the people. We read as much in the Bible, just as we find this truth in archaeology.

It seems odd to us. After all, most people we know do not worship strange fertility goddesses! Yet I wonder about what we do worship today. Especially as we consider the idea of worship as ascribing great worth or value to something. Paul spoke of people whose “god is their appetite” (Phil. 3:19). I wonder if in 3,000 years some archaeologist digs up tokens of my life, what will he see as my “value” or my areas of worship? I want it to be the Lord!

WANT MORE?

Let’s keep working on the first eight Hebrew letters. Next week when many return from Spring Break, we intend to add three more letters giving us 11, exactly one-half of the Hebrew alphabet. Meanwhile, keep practicing saying and writing the first eight letters. Aleph, Beyt (b), gimel (g), daleth (d), hey (h), vav (v), zayin (z), cheyt (ch):



Email us at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com and let us know if you are ready for three more letters!