

The vast treasure needed by Solomon for his great undertakings, including the temple, his two gorgeous palaces and several fortified cities which he built, were supplied from various sources. Besides the immense store left by his father David, a large part was derived from commerce, as the trade of the civilized world then almost entirely passed under the control of Solomon and Hiram. At that period trade was not conducted by individual enterprise, and the profits were not subject to much competition. All was conducted under the authority of the monarch, and a large proportion of the advantages remained in his coffers. The foreign trade of the confederate kings of Judah and Tyre, to which I have alluded already, probably extended through the Mediterranean Sea even to the British Islands—in the opposite direction to the shores of India. This extended commerce brought Solomon gold and silver in abundance, which were then yielded largely in many parts of the east by rivers and mines which have been cleared of their precious stores ages since. Herodotus mentions that the gold from Ophir amounted annually to £3,340,000 Stg. An inland trade with Egypt on the south for linen and horses, and the caravans of spice merchants left considerable profits to Solomon. To these may be added the line of caravans proceeding directly across Asia from the Euphrates and Babylon to Tyre and the Mediterranean. Large revenues were derived from the tribute nations now subject to the Hebrew sceptre. The kings and princes sent their tribute in the form of quantities of the principal articles which their countries produced, but the gold alone from this source amounted annually to £4,795,200 Stg.

After the temple was completed the dedication thereof was postponed till the time for one of the grand annual festivals should arrive. The seventh month of the year when the Feast of Tabernacles was solemnized, a season of rejoicing, hallowed by religious observances was the time selected for this imposing ceremony. As usual the inhabitants of Palestine came flocking in their long caravans to Jerusalem, and for miles round about its walls the tents of the strangers were pitched. But on this occasion the pilgrims were attracted by an event of singular solemnity and interest. We can well fancy their impatient anxiety to witness at last the completion of the great edifice, their eagerness to behold its wonders, and their zeal to be present when the ark was to be deposited in its new and permanent resting place. In that eventful year the Feast of Tabernacles was to last fourteen days, or twice its usual period. Early in the morning of the great day the elders of Israel, the heads of the tribes, the Priests and Levites, assembled and took the tabernacle of the desert, the holy vessels and implements with the ark itself, and set out on their way to the gates of the temple. They were met during their progress by the king in his splendid robes and by an immense congregation. Countless offerings preceded the ark and a sacrifice was presented at frequent intervals. The ark was carried by the priests into the courts, up the broad flights of steps, through the porch and into the sanctuary, where they must have been startled by the blaze of gold which burst upon their eyes.

And now before the ark disappeared for the last time from the eyes of the people, the awful reverence which had kept any inquisitive eyes from prying into the secrets of that sacred chest gave way before the necessity of the occasion. The ancient lid formed by the cherubs was to be removed and a new one without them to be substituted to fit it for its new abode. It was taken off, and in doing so the interior of the ark was seen by Israelitish eyes for the first time for more than four centuries, perhaps for the last time forever. There were various relics of incalculable interest which are recorded to have been laid up within or beside it—the staff or sceptre of Aaron, the pot of manna and the golden censor of Aaron. These all were gone, lost it may be in the Philistine captivity, but it still contained a monument more sacred than any of these. In the darkness of the interior lay the two granite blocks from Mount Sinai, covered with the ancient characters in which were graven, 486 years before, the “Ten Commandments.” “There was nothing in the ark save these.” The new lid was shut down and the ark moved within the veil into the dark and mysterious Holy of Holies. Beneath the wide spreading wings of the new cherubims it was placed to rest, and the retiring priests, as a sign that it was to go out thence no more, drew forth from it the staves or handles by which they had borne it to and fro. The priests who had thus deposited their sacred burden came out of the porch and took up their place in the position which afterwards became consecrated to them—between the porch and the altar. Opposite them stood the great band of musicians clothed in white, beneath them in the open court the vast multitude of spectators. As the priests came out the whole band of musicians burst forth into the joyful strain which forms the burden of the 136th Psalm—“He is good for His mercy endureth forever.” At the same instant it is described that a cloud filled the temple, and so brilliant was the spectacle that the priests could not minister on account of the dazzling light.