



For more perspectives and resources on world economic and financial trends of interest to Christians, visit Wilfred's website "<http://www.eternalvalue.com>" for additional resources and subscribe to the free newsletter *Eternal Value Review: World Review and Market Monitor*.

Gilded Ages

Part I: Solomon, 666 and Gold

By Wilfred Hahn

To this point in history, the greatest period of power and wealth for Israel was during the reign of King Solomon. During this time, for the most part, Israel was at peace. Its land mass stretched from the Mediterranean and northern Egypt to outposts on the River Babylon. Solomon received tributes and levies from many other kingdoms.



First Kings 10 (and also 2 Chronicles 9) gives an account of Solomon's Golden Age, including the ostentatious visit by the Queen of Sheba. An excerpt from 1 Kings 10 (verses 21 to 26, NIV), provides an indication of Solomon's grandeur:

All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days. The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons. King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world

sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift — articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules. Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills.

We see that Solomon was wealthy beyond imagination. However, the Bible makes it clear that these riches were not a result of Solomon's works, but rather a blessing from God. When Solomon asked God for understanding, the Lord responded thus:





Behold [...] I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour [...] so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days (1 Kings 3:12-12, KJV).

Yet, we also know that, while God surely did deliver His promise, Solomon did not finish his life faithful. In time, he allowed the blessings themselves to corrupt him. As he gained power, honor and influence, he began to break many of God's commands. He wandered off to follow his own interests and indulgences. While tragic, it was not surprising. Only two generations earlier, Samuel had warned Israel about the dangers of appointing a king over them. Nevertheless, the people said: "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations" (Samuel 8:19-20).

Even earlier, Moses had expressly laid down requirements should Israel ever want a king. The king "must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:16); "He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold" (verse 17). Solomon did all of these things. He had hundreds of horses, wives and concubines. He built himself an immense palace, much larger than the temple he had built for the Lord. Moreover, he built himself an impressive throne (verses 18-20). While God had told Moses never to build steps in front of any altar, Solomon elected to have six steps leading to his throne with 12 golden lions placed upon them.

And, true to the prophecy of Samuel that the entire nation of Israel would end



A replica of Solomon's temple that was once located in Jerusalem.

Solomon did all of these things. He had hundreds of horses, wives and concubines. He built himself an immense palace, much larger than the temple he had built for the Lord. Moreover, he built himself an impressive throne (verses 18-20).

up being oppressed by their kings economically (1 Samuel 8:10-18), this indeed proved to be the case with Solomon. Jeroboam, appealing to King Rehoboam (Solomon's son) said, "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us" (2 Chronicles 10:4). Solomon had raised a levy upon all Israel (1 Kings 5:13). Other extra-biblical sources indicate that high levels of inflation existed during the later stages of Solomon's reign. As a result, the population was in a plaintive mood.

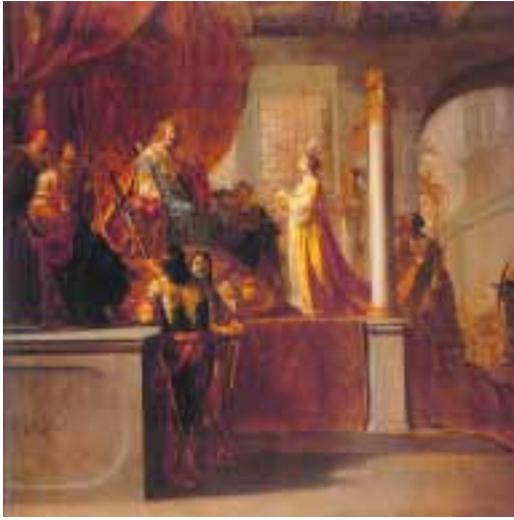
Solomon's Foreshadowing and 666

The account of Solomon's reign holds many lessons, only a few of which we can profitably explore here. Interestingly, Solomon's Golden Age provides a useful type or foreshadow of another type of Gilded Age ... one that the world is hankering after today.

The chapter of 1 Kings 11 is rather remarkable in several respects. In this one chapter is shown both the rise and fall of Solomon, providing another example of a man (mankind) receiving blessings but ultimately forgetting its source and conditional aspects. And, most curiously, the number 666 is mentioned.

What could this infamous number have to do with Solomon's era if anything? In

King Solomon's annual income in terms of talents of gold "was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land" (2 Chronicles 9:13-14, 1 Kings 10:14-15).



this writer's view, the mention of this number is neither accidental nor circumstantial. The Holy Spirit intended it for a reason. In 1 Kings 10:14-15 we read, "The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land." This surely was a large income. Based upon recent gold prices, this would amount to an annual income of about one-half billion in US dollar terms. Based upon the average income of that time, King Solomon would have earned an income equivalent to about 200,000 laborers. In those terms, his annual income would be closer to an equivalent of \$8 to \$10 billion per year. As the Bible confirms, no other king was as rich as he was during that time.

But, let's return to our examination of this curious number — "six hundred threescore and six" as it is phrased in the King James translation. It comes up on only three occasions in the Bible. Most well known is its reference in Revelation 13:18. Another reference is found in Ezra 2:13, where it refers to the number of Adomicam's family that was returning to Jerusalem from Babylon. However, the parallel account in Nehemiah 7:18, counts

By Wilfred Hahn

them differently at 667. Given this apparent inconsistency, we are best not to attribute any importance to this reference.

However, the first reference in the Bible to the number 666 appears in the two parallel records of the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9). In both, the number is mentioned specifically.

But why should its reference here attract further attention? There are at least two reasons. First, the number is incongruous with the rest of these two chapters. It sticks out as a sore thumb.

The two, almost identical, accounts employ many numbers in describing the reign of King Solomon and the opulence of his kingdom and possessions. For example, there are mentioned 300 concubines, 1,400 chariots, 300 shields, and 12,000 horses. Among more than 15 numbers mentioned, there is found one unusual and non-prime number — 666. Of the 11 numbers greater than 100 employed in this chapter, only one of these is not rounded to the nearest one-hundredth or one-thousandth or ending in zero. It is the number 666.

Second, the application and context of this number is ill fitting. King Solomon's annual income in terms of talents of gold "was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land" (2 Chronicles 9:13-14, 1 Kings 10:14-15). The text clearly tells us that he had much greater revenues: 666 talents per year. Then why is the odd number of 666 used in describing his income? It would be just as strange to express one's hourly wage as \$6.66 plus a whole lot more. In any case, it would be strange if Solomon's gold income were not to fluctuate from year to year.

Therefore, we should conclude that this number is meant to provide a symbolic connection (though, of course, used accu-



rately). Its may simply alert us to the fact that King Solomon commanded a prosperous and opulent economy that then descended into idolatry and bureaucratic controls. It was not a “divine” economy but an enterprise of man with all its usual defects and troubles. In the end, the bureaucracy under Solomon ended up becoming a type of oppressor. Says one commentator, “Solomon’s success came at the high price of individual freedom and tribal sovereignty.”¹

The Simple Meaning of 666

The number 666 surely is infamous among both Christians and non-Christians alike. However, before we comment any further, we best keep in mind Joseph Thayer’s comment (author of *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*) concerning this number — “six hundred and sixty six, the meaning of which is the basis of much vain speculation.” As such, we will not embark upon any such speculation and limit ourselves to the Bible’s plain meaning. Anything else would risk misdirection.

No doubt, many levels of meanings may be taken from the number 666. However, in essence, the Bible provides a fairly straightforward description. Said John the Revelator, “If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666” (Revelation 13:18). Clearly, the beast and man are together indicted in this passage. It is man’s number ... representing his systems and beliefs and idolatries. These happen to be enervated by the prince of this world.

It should be noticed that the Revelator’s mention of the number 666 follows right after the verses that inform us that the false prophet will attempt to induce every-



one to take the Mark of the Beast: “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:16-17).

There clearly is an obvious economic and financial connection. An idolatrous man-made system of control is likely indicated, implying self-sufficiency and a reliance upon earthly materialism. Systems such as these are destined for destruction or break-up as happened to Solomon’s kingdom. In this sense, we may see that a common spirit finds a connection with the later stages of Solomon’s reign, the number 666 and the yet future prophetic events.

Thoughts to Ponder

No doubt, today, the world is experiencing a remarkable era. Around the globe, a new unified belief is gaining strength: Mankind’s materialistic systems and globalism — in its simplest form, symbolized by the number 666 — is unstoppable ... or so most people think. A grand new gilded era of peace and economic prosperity seems assured. It would be tempting to agree.

Nowhere is this confidence more evident currently than in the fields of global

The popular and celebrated view is that globalization is leading to another golden age for mankind ... the best and biggest ever ... far better than the previous time that a similar confidence emerged.

Some day, this beast that comes out of the sea will be headed by the Antichrist and used to oppress the entire world. However, to the believing and pure Church, this will be of no concern. The Church — the Philadelphian church — will be kept from this future period.



finance, economics and globalism. The popular and celebrated view is that globalization is leading to another golden age for mankind ... the best and biggest ever ... far better than the previous time that a similar confidence emerged. That period was referred to as the Gilded Age, occurring between 1880 and 1914. It also was a period of rapid technological progress and advances in globalization. Unfortunately, it ended horribly when World War I erupted.

Solomon's later reign of self-reliant commercialism and dependence upon a prosperous economy ended badly. So will the current one. The only difference is that today's "gilded" confidence is more swaggering, unified and globally pervasive than ever before. Its treacheries and deceptions are therefore also much larger and more dangerous. We surely are today experiencing the systemic rise of the 666 system that will very soon intersect with the literal prophecies found in Revelation 13.

All of this may not sound very uplifting and optimistic — again the doom and gloom ruminations of a pessimistic, austere, unloving Bible thumper. However, we can choose to view our current epoch from either of two perspectives: As did

Abraham, "[...] longing for a better country — a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16), or, as "friends of the world" (James 4:4). Actually, the former is an optimistic view, the latter a pessimistic one. It is only "friends of the world" who have both feet firmly staked to hopes of a better and more comfortable place upon earth for a season, that will likely view the perspectives of a liter-

ally interpreted Bible as pessimistic.

Seen within the broad fabric of long-term world trends — not simply in the short-term, but as would the great cloud of heavenly witnesses — evident is a human timeline that the Bible has long prophesied. Its ultimate fate has been prophesied through the prophets in no uncertain terms.

So we see that the systemic aspects of the "beast" symbolized by the number 666 are already operative in our day ... right under our very noses, so to speak. Some day, this beast that comes out of the sea will be headed by the Antichrist and used to oppress the entire world. However, to the believing and pure Church, this will be of no concern. The Church — the Philadelphian church — will be kept from this future period. Christ said to the Philadelphians, "I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

In Part II, we discuss the Bible's perspective on gold and its future role. ©

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Israel From Conquest to Exile*, John J. Davies & John C. Whitcomb, 1989, BHM Books, Indiana, pg. 337.