

# Unveiling Solomon's Temple: Exploring Its Multifaceted Role in Israelite Religious Activities, History, and Identity

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**Abstract:** This paper explores Solomon's Temple's multifaceted role in Israelite religious activities, emphasizing its significance in history, religious practices, and the formation of Jewish identity. By integrating various sources, including biblical texts, archaeological findings, and historical records, this study investigates the consistency between the biblical descriptions and archaeological evidence of Solomon's Temple. The research highlights the Temple's central position in Jewish religious history and its symbolic representation of the covenant between the Jewish people and God, offering profound insights into its religious, historical, and cultural significance.

**Keywords:** Solomon's Temple; Israelite Religious Activities; Jewish Identity; Archaeology; Biblical Texts.

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## 1. Introduction

Solomon's Temple occupies a central position in the religious and historical narratives of the Bible. Solomon's Temple is vital to Jewish religious history, symbolizing the profound connection between the people and God. Its significance is underscored by archaeological revelations on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, a key site intricately linked to the temple's historical legacy. Unearthed remnants, such as stone walls, cornerstones, and architectural fragments, strongly suggest an association with Solomon's Temple. Additionally, the discovery of material culture, including seals and artifacts, provides tangible evidence of the temple's existence. Due to the potential biases in the primary historical narratives of the Bible [8]. This paper explores the consistency between the descriptions of Solomon's first Temple in the Bible and its role in religious activities during the Iron II age in Israel by integrating various sources of information, including biblical texts, archaeological findings, and historical records. The content explores the multifaceted role of Solomon's Temple in Israelite religious activities, emphasizing its significance in history, religious practices, and the formation of the Jewish identity.

## 2. The Role of the Temple in Israelite Religious Activities

The Solomon's Temple played a central role in the religious activities of Israel, renowned for its grandeur and spiritual significance. This temple symbolized the intricate relationship between the Jewish people and God, becoming the focal point of their worship [1]. The Bible provides detailed descriptions of the temple's construction[18], portraying it as a formidable undertaking that reflected the collective devotion of the Jewish community. Consequently, Solomon's Temple became a concrete expression of the covenant relationship between the Israelites and God. The precise instructions for the temple's construction in 1 Kings 7, including specifications, materials, and internal structures, were perceived as God's requirements for the Jewish people. For example, "He built the Lebanon Forest House with four

rows of cedar columns, and with hewn cedar beams above the columns. Its length was 100 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits"[14]. Adhering meticulously to these instructions and observing the rituals became acts of devotion for the Jewish people, affirming the mutual commitment between God and His chosen people. Therefore, Solomon's Temple was the center of worship and a symbol of the covenant between the Jewish people and God. The construction process and dedication ceremonies reflected a profound reverence for God and a sincere belief in the sacred covenant. The existence of this temple became a sacred space for the public gatherings, rituals, and festivals of the Israelites, providing them with a concrete and significant experience of their relationship with God.

## 3. The Historical Significance of Solomon's Temple

In addition to its contemporary role in religious activities, the Temple of Solomon from the 10th century holds profound historical significance for the Jewish people, seen as a manifestation of the power of God. From an archaeological perspective, Solomon's Temple aligns with the descriptions in the Bible and is believed to have been constructed in the 10th century [4]. The construction and dedication of this temple are mentioned in 1 Chronicles 28, fulfilling the covenant established between God and David. Thus, the Temple of Solomon is not merely a religious structure but a living monument[10]. It constantly reminds people of significant events in Israel's history and reinforces the continuity of their divine promises with their ancestors. Moreover, Solomon's reign is idealized in the Bible as the golden age of Israel's history. He is portrayed as exceedingly wise and exceptionally wealthy. Essentially, the Temple of Solomon is a multifaceted institution playing a central role in Israel's religious life. It symbolizes the presence of God, serves as a historical marker, and attests to the covenant relationship between the Jewish people and their Creator. The significance of the temple extends beyond its material structure, permeating the spiritual, historical, and communal aspects of the Jewish faith, leaving an indelible mark on the religious identity of the Israelites.

The idealized portrayal of Solomon in the Bible may stem from his fulfillment of the covenant with God, resulting in divine blessings[7]. Narratives in the Bible, such as the story of God controlling lions to save Daniel in the Book of Isaiah and the Book of Jeremiah, emphasize God's blessings and omnipotent effects. This depiction deepens people's faith in God through the Bible, fostering a more sincere belief in God's existence and divine power. Such faith not only influenced contemporary Jewish society but also had profound effects in subsequent history.

#### 4. The Solomon's Temple and the Unique Identity of Jewish Society

In Jewish history, the Bible marks a crucial shift from tribal alliances to a unified monarchy through the descriptions of Solomon's Temple. This transition began when God, through the prophet Samuel, appointed Saul as king, uniting the scattered tribes into a nation. David's rule further solidified this unity, and his son Solomon's construction of the magnificent Temple symbolized religious and national authority. The period of Solomon's Temple aligns with the dates of the unified monarchy at that time[6]. The Temple's construction required unity, demonstrating the monarchy's political and religious stability, and fostering national development. This period established a unique historical identity for the Jewish people, affirming their status as God's chosen people and forming a unified, enduring community. The Temple's presence linked past promises and prophecies, marking a pivotal moment in Jewish society.

#### 5. Fabricated Inscriptions

People may have intentionally fabricated inscriptions in later historical periods to support or emphasize the authenticity of biblical stories. Such behavior may stem from religious, historical, or political pursuits. For example, there might be an attempt to strengthen the narrative of Solomon's Temple found in the Bible by inscriptions discovered at the site of the Temple. The fraudulent Jehoash Inscription tablet narrates, 'To commemorate the refurbishment of the First Temple by King Joash at the end of the ninth century BCE [5].' There is an intention to align historical sites with religious texts, making the narrative in the Bible appear more credible. Additionally, archaeological discoveries, like the pomegranates described in 1 Kings 7:18, "He made the columns so that there were two rows [of pomegranates] encircling the top of the one network, to cover the capitals that were on the top of the pomegranates; and he did the same for [the network on] the second capital" [15]. This further confirms the temple's significance (see Fig. 1). The spurious inscriptions on this artifact, claiming 'Belonging to the Temple of the Lord [Yahweh], holy to the priests,' provide compelling evidence that the elaborate ceremonies within the temple served as a conduit for communication with God, fostering a profound connection between the divine and worshipers. This fabricated inscription can demonstrate that the temple is more than just a structure, as highlighted in 1 Kings 8; it symbolizes the tangible abode of God on Earth. Such practices might be driven by faith, attempting to solidify religious beliefs by leaving supporting texts at the actual historical site. The commonality between these two fraudulent inscriptions is that the artifacts are real, but the inscriptions are not from the contemporaneous period. When studying archaeology as evidence for the authenticity of the

Bible, these inscriptions enhance our trust in biblical narratives [2]. In conclusion, the discovery of fabricated inscriptions at the site of Solomon's Temple could lead to a deeper investigation into the authenticity of the Bible while also highlighting the intricate relationship between history and religion.



Fig 1. The Ivory pomegranate [13]

#### 6. Solomon's Temple and Phoenician Influence

A series of related pieces of evidence from archaeology and the Bible collectively support the possibility that the ancient structure is indeed Solomon's Temple. The description of Solomon's Temple in the Bible, dating back to the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, aligns with archaeological findings[11]. This provides substantial support for the existence of Solomon's Temple.

In 1 Kings 7, the description of the construction of Solomon's Temple mentions elements related to the Phoenicians. Particularly noteworthy is the explicit reference to the architect Hiram, identified as a Phoenician. This discovery suggests that Phoenician culture may have influenced the architecture of Solomon's Temple. Moreover, certain architectural elements in Solomon's Temple, such as Boaz and Jachin's two massive bronze pillars exhibit design and craftsmanship related to Phoenician styles and techniques. Descriptions of Hiram's skills in 1 Kings 7:13-14 and 2 Kings 4:29-34 align with Phoenician artistic traditions. Additionally, the use of imported building materials in Solomon's Temple, potentially influenced by Phoenician architectural styles, further supports this cultural exchange.

On the royal fortress gate is a capital adorned with a stylized palm tree(see Fig.2). Simultaneously, palm tree elements have been identified in Phoenician architecture[19]. The plan of Phoenician temples resembles Solomon's Temple[19], indicating a certain degree of cultural and architectural influence between the two. This similarity extends beyond decorative styles, possibly reflecting trade, cultural exchange, and potential technological transfer between Phoenicians and Jews. Archaeological discoveries corroborate the international cooperation mentioned in the Bible, where Solomon contracted Hiram, the Phoenician king of Tyre [18]. The Phoenician king provided carpenters, builders, and artisans for Solomon.

Finally, the absence of direct mention of palm tree elements in Solomon's construction in the Bible could be attributed to the selective nature of biblical narratives, emphasizing key themes related to God's teachings, history, and redemption plans. It may also be because palm tree elements were considered commonplace in the cultural context of that time

and, therefore, were not explicitly emphasized. This narrative choice aligns with the religious and theological purposes of the text.



Fig 2. The royal fortress gate [17]

## 7. The Containers of the Temple Altar

The excavated firepan served as a container for transporting live coals to or from the Tabernacle and the Temple alt[9]6). This archaeological discovery corroborates the presence of the gold firepans mentioned in 1 Kings 7:50, "the basins, snuffers, sprinkling bowls, ladles, and fire pans, of solid gold; and the hinge sockets for the doors of the innermost part of the House, the Holy of Holies, and for the doors of the Great Hall of the House, of gold"[15]. The existence of this firepan provides tangible evidence regarding ancient religious rituals and temple sacrifices. The use of gold firepans may have been associated with specific religious ceremonies and sacrifices, further highlighting the significance of Solomon's Temple in religious practices. Additionally, these golden vessels underscore the reverence for worshiping God and the respect for sacred space while also showcasing the wealth and power of the Kingdom of Solomon. Furthermore, the use of gold in sacred places signifies the special status of gold in the national symbolism and wealth of the Solomon dynasty. In summary, the gold firepan not only embodies the worship of God but also reflects the prosperity and economic strength of the entire nation during that period.

## 8. Seals, Culture, and Religion

The presence of seals unearthed from Solomon's Temple provides profound insights into the society and culture of the 10th century BCE (see Fig. 3). The carvings on these seals depict one animal pressing down on another[12]. Firstly, seals might have been used to authenticate personal identity and status. In this society, wealthy or special-status individuals could use such seals to leave a personal mark on documents, validating their identity. Secondly, seals could have been employed to seal documents, ensuring their integrity and authenticity. By leaving a personal seal on a document, these seals became a unique identifier, proving that the document had not been tampered with. This was crucial for ensuring the reliability of contracts, transactions, and other important documents. The seals' holes suggest that they could be worn around the neck, possibly as adornments. This practice emphasized the identity and status of the seal's owner and may have also carried specific symbolic meanings. Wearing such seals could be a way to showcase power and status and convey a particular social standing or responsibility. Moreover, symbolic images could serve as a means of conveying

narratives to those who were illiterate. Lastly, these seals laid the cultural and technological foundation for the seal impression of King Hezekiah, created in the 8th century BCE. They reflect the practices of personal authentication and document preservation in the society of that time.



Fig 3. The Seal, Jerusalem [12]

The animal images on the seal may present information contradicting the Bible. In the Bible, the act of carving or worshiping animal images is considered idolatry, a violation of God's commandments in Exodus 20:4. This reflects the emphasis on monotheism and the prohibition of worshiping any physical image. In this religious context, any image related to animals, especially in a worship context, could be interpreted as a violation of this commandment. Therefore, despite the potential cultural and societal insights provided by the animal images on the seal, it might be considered contradictory to the teachings of the Bible and perceived as an act of idol worship. It is also possible that the biblical text was written in different historical periods and backgrounds, a time when seals were not discovered, or seal technology had become obsolete.

The Bible does not mention seals, perhaps because the primary focus is on religious, moral, and theological aspects, with relatively less emphasis on detailed descriptions of society and culture. Consequently, some details related to society and culture may not have been extensively elaborated in the text. Seals, as tools of society and culture, are often associated with administrative, commercial, and legal affairs. Another possibility is that, following the stratum law of superposition, the construction of the Second Temple was built upon the foundations of the First Temple, which had been destroyed during the Babylonian dynasty. The Jews returning from the Babylonian exile were unaware of the information about the previous images. Additionally, the biblical text could have been written in different historical periods and backgrounds, and the authors' focuses and purposes may have influenced their selective presentation of information. In the Bible, specific details related to society and culture might have been overlooked or not extensively recorded.



Fig 4. The drawing of the seal's impression

The animal on the seal may be a bull (see Fig. 4). In 1 Kings 12:28, it is narrated that Jeroboam chose a golden calf as a religious symbol for his new kingdom, associating these

images with the God Yahweh, who brought them out of Egypt, to convey a sense of divine presence. These golden calf images are considered Israelite counterparts to the Cherubim and Ark images in Solomon's Temple, serving as symbols of divine presence [3]. This artifact could potentially attest to Jeroboam's deviation from the Jewish religious tradition mentioned in the Bible and his attempt to establish a worship system different from Solomon's Temple within the kingdom.

## 9. Symbolism of Temple Artifacts

The archaeological discovery of a gold badge engraved with the pattern of the seven-branched menorah from the Temple may symbolize one of the elements of Solomon's Temple (see Fig.5). This could be the golden menorah described in 1 Kings 7:49[16]. The seven-branched menorah likely held significant importance in the Temple, representing light, revelation, and the presence of God. Such a badge might have been used in religious ceremonies, celebrations, or special occasions to emphasize reverence for God and acknowledge the Temple's historical significance. Additionally, this type of badge could be seen as a symbol of faith, connecting individuals to the traditions and history of Judaism. Wearing such a badge might serve as an expression of religious identity and a commemoration of the spiritual significance of Solomon's Temple.



Fig 5. The Hoard, Jerusalem

## 10. Conclusion

In summary, Solomon's Temple, as explored through biblical texts and archaeological findings, is a central and consistent symbol in Jewish history. The Temple's archaeological remnants, petrography analysis, and real-world artifacts affirm its existence and highlight the collaboration between Jews and Phoenicians. As a pivotal religious center, the Temple played a crucial role in Israelite worship, embodying a deep covenant between the Jewish people and God. Beyond its contemporary significance, the Temple holds historical importance, representing divine power and marking a pivotal era in Israel's history. Discoveries such as the firepan, seals, and the seven-branched menorah badge provide glimpses into the religious practices and cultural aspects of the time, enriching our understanding of the 10th-century BCE society. Despite potential discrepancies with biblical teachings, these artifacts contribute to the intricate tapestry of the Temple's influence on the Jewish faith's spiritual, historical, and communal facets. In essence, Solomon's Temple remains an enduring symbol, leaving an indelible mark on the religious identity of the Israelites.

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