

Solomon – The Lure of Wisdom by Steven Weitzman.
Jewish Lives series, Yale University Press 2011.

The greatest of all the biblical kings was probably not Solomon but, in geo-political terms, one of his successors; however, in terms of his reputation and of his achievements, not least in building the first Temple in Jerusalem, he reigns supreme in the traditions of the three Abrahamic faiths.

In Solomon – The Lure of Wisdom, Steven Weitzman, Daniel E. Koshland Professor of Jewish Culture and Religion at Stanford University, presents a multi-faceted biography of the great king in eleven chapters: A Life in letters; A Lust for Knowledge; Succession Struggles; Solomonic Judgements; Sacred Books, Satanic Verses; The King of Kings; Building Heaven on Earth, Mining for Solomon's Gold; Difficult Questions from a Dubious Queen; A Thousand and One Sex Scandals; Afterthoughts.

Professor Weitzman's approach is to dissect the biblical material about Solomon, asking percipient questions of it and providing some intriguing answers; but his study is not restricted to the Bible alone, for he adduces many other sources, Jewish, Christian and Muslim as he traces the development of Solomon's story in those contexts as well as those echoes of him and especially his quest for wisdom which have influenced broader secular culture.

This small book, part of the Yale Jewish Lives series which have already considered Sarah Bernhardt and Moses Mendelssohn and which will one day embrace, inter alia, Jacob, Rashi, Martin Buber, Bob Dylan and Franz Kafka, packs an enormous amount into its 191 pages; it is an excellent, informative and engaging read, for scholar and lay person alike, and would also make an excellent gift for anyone interested in learning more about one of the Bible's towering figures.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh