

1 Kings 5: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [0 : 0 0] 1 Kings chapter 5 Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon when he heard that they had anointed him king in the place of his father. For Hiram always loved David.
- And Solomon sent word to Hiram, You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God, because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet.
- But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor misfortune. And so I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God. As the Lord said to David my father, Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.
- Now therefore command that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me, and my servants will join your servants, and I will pay you for your servants such wages as you set. For you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians.
- As soon as Hiram heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly and said, Blessed be the Lord this day, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have heard the message that you have sent to me.
- [1 : 1 0] I am ready to do all you desire in the matter of cedar and cypress timber. My servants shall bring it down to the sea from Lebanon, and I will make it into rafts to go by sea to the place you direct.
- And I will have them broken up there, and you shall receive it. And you shall meet my wishes by providing food for my household. So Hiram supplied Solomon with all the timber of cedar and cypress that he desired, while Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand cores of wheat as food for his household, and twenty thousand cores of beaten oil.
- Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year. And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. And there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty.
- King Solomon drafted forced labour out of all Israel, and the draft numbered thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts. They would be a month in Lebanon, and two months at home.
- Adoniram was in charge of the draft. Solomon also had seventy thousand burden bearers, and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, besides Solomon's three thousand three hundred chief officers who were over the work, who had charge of the people who carried on the work.
- [2 : 2 1] At the king's command they quarried out great costly stones, in order to lay the foundations of the house with dressed stones. So Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders, and the men of Giebel did the cutting, and prepared the timber and the stone to build the house.
- In 1 Kings chapter 4 verses 24 to 25, we were told of Solomon's power over the surrounding region. Solomon doesn't just rule effectively over the entire territory of Israel, he also secures the peace and stability of the wider region.

For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates, from Tifsa to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him.

And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine, and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon. The whole of the region between the great northern powers and the great southern power of Egypt, a region that was generally unsettled and violent, now knows rest and security.

It's achieved through Solomon's might and wisdom. Now in chapter 5 we read of Solomon's relations with one of his most important vassals, Hiram of Tyre. We can have a very negative view about the military dominance of kingdoms and empires, but scripture's view about the dominance of empires and kingdoms is rather more ambivalent and complicated.

[3 : 44] In large part this is because it recognises the relationship between strong central sovereignty and the way that that protects realms from the violent contestation of sovereignty that can happen otherwise.

Power vacuums are incredibly dangerous things, as many parties will try to fill them, and if there is no single party that can effectively do so and establish a truly effective dominance, violence can be interminable.

A dominant king in Israel discourages the violence of rebels and grants peace to the entire region under his protection. David's weakness towards the end of his reign had invited all sorts of conflict, both internally and externally, but Solomon's power and dominance spreads peace beyond Israel's borders.

Israel's vision was not imperial, although you might see some imperial elements to the way that Solomon becomes a king of kings in this chapter, acting as a suzerain to other vassal kingdoms.

Israel has clearly defined borders for its territorial ambitions. It is not acquisitive or predatory, like many of the great empires. However, its dominance of the region is presented as an exceedingly positive thing.

[4 : 52] Israel enjoys good relations with the surrounding kingdoms like Tyre, and rather than suppressing them, it secures their peace in exchange for tribute. In such a peaceful context, everyone can prosper.

People dwell under their own vine or fig tree, people have their own capital and security, and they can build their own lives within the king's peace. When the land is secure, you can settle down, you can make plans for the future, you can raise a family, build towns, work the land, nations can extend their trade routes, grand construction projects and public works can be undertaken, people can travel large distances in safety, a national culture and identity can develop with a growing realm of shared national life and spectacle, neighbouring and even distant peoples can learn from each other, cultures can thrive.

Without the dominance of Solomon as a king over the entire region, the cultural heights that Israel achieved during this period would simply not have been possible. Solomon's reign was far from perfect, and the problems become more apparent later on.

However, if one imagines the experience of an Israelite family during this period, one should get a sense of how remarkable Solomon's golden age must have felt for those who lived through it. In recent memory, the kingdom had experienced a number of violent rebellions in the civil war.

There were wars on various sides. Less than 50 years earlier, vast swathes of the land were controlled by the Philistines and others. The citadel of the chief city of the land had only been captured a few decades previously.

[6 : 25] The nation had suffered catastrophic defeats at the battles of Aphek and Gilboa. They had lived through the reign of a tyrant who had killed all of the priests. And before that, the situation had been even worse, with Israel under the thumb of various peoples around them, fighting for their very survival.

But now, finally, there is peace on every side. They know security and prosperity. Riches and resources are flowing into the land from all sides. They are eating things that they had never tasted before.

The life of their towns is thriving, and other people are coming to learn from them and to trade with them. An immense palace and a temple are being built in their capital. They have a wise and a just king, who is admired by people all around.

One can imagine that it would have felt little short of miraculous, and the sense of the fulfillment of the Lord's promises would have been very pronounced. This chapter may seem unimportant to the modern reader, but it gives a window into the world of Solomon's reign.

Hiram had been a friend of David, and now he continues this friendship with Solomon his son. 2 Samuel chapter 10 illustrates the way that the transition from one king to another could be a time when foreign relations could break down.

[7 : 38] No such thing happens with Solomon and Hiram, however. Solomon is a just, wise and gracious suzerain, with very positive relations with his vassal Hiram. Hiram does over and above what Solomon requests.

There are clearly good relations between them. He gives cypress in addition to cedar. His own men will transport the wood south. When he presents his terms to Solomon, Solomon is clearly happy to accept them without any dispute.

In verse 12, all of this is traced back to the Lord's gift of wisdom to Solomon. The arrangement between Solomon and Hiram is an important example of the riches of foreign lands being brought into the house of the Lord.

Solomon is a mature Adam. He is a man with the knowledge of good and evil. He is a man who is gathering the manifold treasures from the lands of Havilah and elsewhere and bringing them into this new Eden to dress the garden of the Lord.

Solomon is a man who names the creation. He gathers great trees and massive stones, mastering the earth. He is building his own Eden. With peace on all sides, he can finally bring the nation into its long-awaited Sabbath.

[8 : 45] And it isn't merely cedars and cypresses, but the Gentiles honoring the name of the Lord. The riches of the Gentiles are coming in and the food of Israel is being given to the nations so that they can also share in God's good gifts and feast with the people of the Lord.

This might remind us of figures such as Melchizedek or Jethro and anticipate figures such as Cyrus and the Magi. In each case, the Gentiles are recognizing and blessing the people of the Lord.

All of this is preparing for the construction of the temple, which will be the great jewel in the kingdom, the house of rest for the Lord, the one who has given them this peace on every side and the prosperity that they are currently enjoying.

Solomon speaks of the building of the temple in terms of the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel chapter 7. He relates the peace that the land enjoys with the blessing and the promise of the Lord.

And he desires to build a temple that will be the great culmination of that peace, the peace that the nation is enjoying in the fulfillment of God's word. A question to consider.

[9 : 53] What about the character of wisdom is on display in this chapter?