

# 1 Kings 9: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     1 Kings chapter 9 As soon as Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house, and all that Solomon desired to build, the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. And the Lord said to him, I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me.

I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.

But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them. And the house that I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight. And Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house? Then they will say, Because they abandoned the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them. At the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the Lord and the king's house, and Hiram king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress, timber and gold, as much as he desired. King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee.

But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. Therefore he said, What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother?

So they are called the land of Cable to this day. Hiram had sent the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold. And this is the account of the forced labour that King Solomon drafted to build the house of the Lord, and his own house, and the millow, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Giza. Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Giza, and burned it with fire, and had killed the Canaanites who lived in the city, and had given it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife. So Solomon rebuilt Giza. And lower Beth-horon, and Baalath, and Tamar in the wilderness, in the land of Judah, and all the store cities that Solomon had, and the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen, and whatever Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel, their descendants who were left after them in the land, whom the people of Israel were unable to devote to destruction, these Solomon drafted to be slaves, and so they are to this day. But of the people of Israel Solomon made no slaves. They were the soldiers, they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, his chariot commanders, and his horsemen. These were the chief officers who were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty who had charge of the people who carried on the work. But Pharaoh's daughter went up from the city of David to her own house that Solomon had built for her. Then he built the millow. Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar that he built to the Lord, making offerings with it before the Lord. So he finished the house. King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-Geba, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom.

[ 3 : 52 ] And Hiram sent with the fleet his servants, seamen who were familiar with the sea, together with the servants of Solomon. And they went to Ophir, and brought from their gold four hundred and twenty talents, and they brought it to King Solomon. 1 Kings chapter 9 follows Solomon's prayer of dedication, and could be read as, in part, God's response to it. There was an earlier dream in chapter 3, when Solomon received the gift of wisdom, and now he is given a second dream, in which the Lord answers the prayer that he made in the preceding chapter. Solomon's prayer had been that the Lord would make the temple that Solomon had built his dwelling place. And the Lord says that he will place his name there, also his eyes and his heart, consecrating the temple as his own. Placing his name there was a form of identification with the temple. It was his own, and a site of his honour and his glory. As the place of his eyes and his heart, perhaps the Lord expresses his relationship to the house in an even fuller way than Solomon requested.

The Lord judges with his eyes, and the presence of his heart in the house implies a more intimate form of identification. These are conditional promises that Solomon is given. He and his sons must walk faithfully before the Lord. If they do, David will never lack a man on the throne of Israel. If they do not, however, they will be cut off from the land. Israel will become a proverb and a byword among the peoples, and the temple a heap of ruins. The temple will be cast out of the Lord's sight. It's a sort of bridal house, and the sin of Israel could lead to a kind of divorce. The judgment upon the temple would be a symbolic judgment upon the people as the bride of the Lord. Israel always lived their life in the sight of the nations, and if they were so severely judged by the Lord, the other nations were supposed to draw a lesson about the Lord's justice from the curse of the covenant falling upon his people. In verses 8 and 9, everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house? Then they will say,

Because they abandoned the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods and worshipped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them. Solomon, as we have already seen, is like a new Adam, in a far more glorious and extensive Eden. He is no longer just like a young child. He is the grown son, ruling in the name of his father. He is sending out into the world and gathering from surrounding lands, like the lands that surrounded the Garden of Eden. He is getting gold from the land of Ophir, perhaps associated with the land of Havilah. He is sending out vessels out upon the seas. He needs to be faithful, however, lest he be expelled. As Peter Lightheart notes, the description of Solomon's great works in this chapter should make us think of Ecclesiastes chapter 2 verses 4 to 9.

I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold, and had the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great, and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Solomon is constructing a new Eden, and much as in the case of the first Eden, the success of this endeavour will depend greatly upon whether or not Solomon will be faithful. His creation is finished in much the same way as the Lord's was finished on the seventh day of creation, and now Solomon and the people are entering into a great Sabbath. The building of the two houses took twenty years, the temple which took seven years, and then the palace of Solomon which took thirteen years. In light of 1 Kings chapter 6 verse 1, we know that this was the 500th year after the Exodus. This is a great jubilee, ten times fifty years.

However, at this point some clouds start to appear on what had once been a gloriously blue sky. The relationship with Hiram of Tyre, that had been so wonderful back in chapter 5, is now weakened.

[ 8 : 14 ] Solomon seemingly gives Hiram substandard cities in reward for his assistance, and his provision of materials in the building of the temple. Rather than giving him the handsome reward that he ought to have done, strengthening the bond between their lands, Solomon gives him a poor gift in return for his generous assistance, maybe playing more to his dominance over Hiram as his vassal, rather than upon a healthy relationship as a friend.

We should almost certainly also be troubled by Solomon's willingness to treat Israelite territory as something to be given to a Gentile king in payment for something. The land is not Solomon's to dispose of. It is the inheritance of the Lord, and should not be alienated from his sons.

In this great jubilee, there is an unsettling reversal of jubilee themes. The land is being alienated from the people. The conquest of the land had never fully been achieved.

Canaanites remained in it. However, Solomon subjected remaining Canaanites to forced service. In a somewhat ironic event, Pharaoh destroyed the Canaanites of Giza, a city that the Israelites had failed to capture back in Judges chapter 1 verses 29, and then he gives it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife. Israel was originally a people dwelling alone and not counting itself among the nations, as they were described in one of the oracles of Balaam. Under Solomon, they are becoming increasingly cosmopolitan, and with that there is the insistent temptation to become more like the surrounding peoples and nations. Towards the end of this chapter, we see Solomon's failure to maintain the distinctiveness of Israel. He is starting to develop characteristics reminiscent of Pharaoh.

He is developing a large body of forced labour and building store cities with them. The last time that we saw this was back in Exodus chapter 1 verse 11, when Pharaoh was subjecting the children of Israel to harsh labour. Solomon is also accumulating troubling quantities of gold, considering that the Lord had warned the king not to accumulate excessive quantities of silver and gold back in Deuteronomy chapter 17 verse 17. He is also assembling great numbers of chariots, another thing which the Lord had warned about. However, while these threatening clouds are starting to gather, much else is encouraging.

[10:26] We hardly ever read of seafaring in the Old Testament. The sea is associated with the Gentiles, and Israel is associated with the land. However, now Israel is learning the ways of the sea from surrounding Gentiles. They are developing skills from more technologically and culturally advanced peoples. They are venturing forth onto the sea, and as a result, the influence of Israel is growing, as is their affluence.

A question to consider. There are a number of different Gentiles in this chapter, with different sorts of relationships with Solomon. Hiram, the remaining Canaanites in the land, and Pharaoh.

What are the differences between these figures and the ways that Solomon relates to them? In what ways does he fail to relate to them appropriately?