

“Vanity of Vanities”  
1 Kings 9:10-28  
(Preached at Trinity, December 6, 2020)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Solomon had been anointed as king following his father, David. He reigned in Israel for forty years. According to **Verse 10** this chapter falls halfway through his reign.
  - A. In **Chapter 2** we read that David's final words to Solomon was to obey God in faithfulness.

**1 Kings 2:3-4 NAU** - "Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn, <sup>4</sup> so that the LORD may carry out His promise which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"
  - B. In **Verses 1-9** we read that God appeared to Solomon and affirmed this charge with powerful conditional statements.

**1 Kings 9:4-5 NAU** - "if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you *and* will keep My statutes and My ordinances, <sup>5</sup> then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David"

**1 Kings 9:6-7 NAU** - "But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, <sup>7</sup> then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples."
2. Things were good in Israel. Today, we would use the expression, "They had arrived." They were at peace and Solomon enjoyed untold riches. He had all that his heart could desire. **Verses 10-28** give us a snapshot of Solomon's reign. It is divided into five sections.
  1. **Verses 10-14** describe Solomon's political dealings – particularly his alliance with Hiram.
  2. **Verses 15-24** describe Solomon maintaining the security of his kingdom.
  3. **Verse 24** describes Solomon's beautiful Egyptian wife.
  4. **Verse 25** has a focus on Solomon's religious devotion
  5. **Verses 26-28** describe Solomon's business dealings

3. The author is largely pro-Solomon. We are being told of all the excellent accomplishments during Solomon's reign. These things may not seem significant as we consider the reign of Solomon. Dale Ralph Davis commented that Solomon was simply doing what kings do.  
"these activities highlighted in verses 10–28 are, on the whole, legitimate concerns of kings. They are simply what kings do."<sup>1</sup>
  4. Nothing is insignificant in the lives of God's people. We can't ignore the importance of God's words immediately preceding this part of the chapter. In all of our activities and labors we must maintain a high focus on obedience to God's commands. We are always in danger of being derailed.
  5. Solomon would write of this very thing – the emptiness of everything without maintaining a focus upon God.  
**Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 NAU** - "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." <sup>3</sup> What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?"
- I. The author is careful to record all of Solomon's successes
- A. **Verses 10-14** describe Solomon's political dealings – particularly his alliance with Hiram.
    1. The original agreement was for Solomon to pay for Hiram's services with grain and oil. Apparently the massive expense of Solomon's building projects far exceeded the value of the grain he provided to Hiram.  
**1 Kings 5:11 NAU** - "Solomon then gave Hiram 20,000 kors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty kors of beaten oil; thus Solomon would give Hiram year by year."
    2. **Verse 11** describes the massive amounts of cedar and cypress sent by Hiram. It also tells us he sent gold. **Verse 14** tells us how much gold – 120 talents. That is over four tons!  
To offset the deficit Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee.
      - a. We must not overlook that the land of Israel was God's gift to them. He threatened the loss of the land for disobedience in **Ver. 7** Here we find Solomon giving it away to a pagan king.  
We aren't told exactly what led up to this decision by Solomon, but we *are* told that Hiram wasn't impressed.
      - b. We might see this as God already beginning to bring the judgment threatened in **Verse 7**. A portion of the Promised Land has now fallen back into the hands of the Gentiles.
      - c. When Hiram came to inspect the cities he found them totally insufficient – **Verses 12-13**. The word for "not pleased" literally means, "not right." Hiram didn't feel Solomon was dealing with him in a right manner.  
Hiram referred to them as Cabul and it became their name.  
Cabul means good for nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 100.

3. Solomon had become so powerful Hiram had little recourse. We read nothing of Solomon seeking to resolve the problem but Hiram felt cheated.
  4. The author gives no hint of faulting Solomon here, but God places a high value upon fairness in our business dealings.  
**Leviticus 19:35-36 NAU** - "You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. <sup>36</sup> 'You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt."
- B. **Verses 15-24** describe Solomon maintaining the security of his kingdom.
1. We find here that Solomon put all of the defeated nations under slavery.  
**1 Kings 9:20-21 NAU** - "As for all the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, who were not of the sons of Israel, <sup>21</sup> their descendants who were left after them in the land whom the sons of Israel were unable to destroy utterly, from them Solomon levied forced laborers, even to this day."
    - A. Again, the author gives no hint of impropriety here. Defeated enemies were often reduced to slavery. Solomon needed a great labor force to accomplish his many building projects.
    - B. It all seems excessive, however. The last time we read of "storage cities" (**Verse 19**) was when Pharaoh employed the Israelite slaves to build his own.  
**Exodus. 1:11 NAU** - "So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses."
  2. **Verse 22** specifically records that Solomon did not make slaves of Israelites. However, Israel saw it differently. After Solomon's death they complained to his son,  
**1 Kings 12:4 NAU** - "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you."
  3. Solomon gave attention to fortifying the cities and maintaining a powerful army.  
**1 Kings 9:22 NAU** - "But Solomon did not make slaves of the sons of Israel; for they were men of war, his servants, his princes, his captains, his chariot commanders, and his horsemen."
- C. **Verse 24** describes Solomon's beautiful wife.
1. Caring for one's wife is a high virtue. Solomon built her a separate palace.  
**1 Kings 7:8 NAU** - "His house where he was to live, the other court inward from the hall, was of the same workmanship. He also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom Solomon had married."
  2. We are also told he built the Millo for her. We aren't sure what this was. One commentator has suggested it was a beautiful terrace.

3. Solomon's problem was he wasn't satisfied with one beautiful wife. This would be his undoing. The tragic thing is Solomon knew this.  
**Proverbs 5:18-19 NAU** - "Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. <sup>19</sup> As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love."

D. **Verse 25** has a focus on Solomon's religious devotion

1. Solomon maintained devotion towards God
2. He spent seven years building the Temple. Nothing was spared in making it worthy of the glory of God. Untold sheep and oxen were offered up at the Temple dedication.
3. Now we are told that Solomon carefully maintained the religious practices. The end of **Verse 25** is difficult to translate but the NIV suggests: "and so fulfilled the temple obligations."
4. Few of Israel's kings maintained the piety of Solomon.

E. **Verses 26-28** describe Solomon's business dealings

1. Solomon was shrewd in his business dealings forging an alliance with Hiram. The people of Tyre were skilled sailors. Through this alliance Solomon began to extend Israel's influence internationally. The text tells us tons of gold were transferred to Israel.
2. Solomon had everything a king could want – property, possessions, servants, many beautiful wives.  
But every moment of every day it was essential for him to keep his heart upon God. Did he see everything as a blessing from God and did he use everything for the glory of God? Would he devote his kingdom to the work of God?  
We are always in danger of losing our focus

II. There is a universal axiom that is placed before every human being.

In all that we do God must be our focus. Everything is for His glory.

A. What good is it if we gain everything in this world and lose our soul?

**Matthew 16:24-26 NAU** - "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. <sup>25</sup> "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

1. Solomon would later describe the futility of all of his accomplishments without God at the center.

**Ecclesiastes 2:4-11 NAU** - "I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; <sup>5</sup> I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; <sup>6</sup> I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. <sup>7</sup> I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men-- many concubines. <sup>9</sup> Then I became great and increased more than all

who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. <sup>10</sup> All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. <sup>11</sup> Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun."

2. Most people are satisfied with the things of this world.
- B. Solomon continues to stand before us as a warning
1. The author of 1 Kings maintains a high view of Solomon and his accomplishments. And he is justified in his defense of this king. Everything points to excellence. He was highly blessed of God.
  2. If only we didn't know his end.  
**1 Kings 11:4-6 NAU** - "For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*. <sup>5</sup> For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father *had done*."

#### Conclusion:

1. This stands as a warning, but there is also comfort. We may have followed the course of Solomon, using our blessings to satisfy our own fleshly greed and ambition. We may have made sinful decisions that have turned our heart from God. Philip Ryken states the situation well: "It would be nice to think that we will make the right choice in life, and keep on making it, but this will take more than good intentions. Not everyone does make the right choice in life. Indeed, not everyone can. In fact, there is a sense in which no one can at all."<sup>2</sup>
2. Ryken is correct that none of us have perfectly followed God. No one is able to live perfectly before God. This is why the Gospel gives us comfort and assurance.
3. Its never too late to turn to Christ. It begins by seeing our need of Him. It begins by hearing the words and warning of Solomon: "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." <sup>3</sup> What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?" (**Eccl 1:3**)  
 The word for "vanity" literally means "futility."  
 A life without Christ is the worst of all futility.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Iain M. Duguid, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 259.