

1 Kings 9:10-28

Limits of the Text

On the one hand, 1 Kings 9:10-28 is a complete literary unit, a set of miscellaneous activities of King Solomon. On the other hand, it is difficult to interpret without the first half of the chapter. It seems that God's response to Solomon (1 Ki 9:1-9) both competes the temple dedication and serves as the backdrop for Solomon's activities.

Towards Authorial Intent

Discerning authorial intent in this section is difficult. None of the typical indicators are present. The **pace** of the text is, however, worth considering. After slowing down and covering the building of the temple with great detail, the author flies over the events in this section; none get anywhere near the attention of the temple. The pace might indicate the comparative unimportance of these activities.

External Context

This section continues the reign of Solomon, although it opens a new chapter in his reign, one that focuses on Solomon's wealth.

Interpretation

9:10 At the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the Lord and the king's house, 11 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. 12 But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. 13 Therefore he said, "What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother?" So they are called the land of Cabul to this day. 14 Hiram had sent to the king 120 talents of gold.¹

Solomon's first pursuit is his ongoing foreign relations with King Hiram of Tyre. In 1 Ki 5:1-12, the two struck a deal for Hiram to supply wood for building and Solomon to repay in food. In this update of their relationship, Hiram had already given Solomon 9000 pounds of gold, so in exchange Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in Galilee.

The exact reason for this exchange is unknown, and it seems like there is one guess for every commentator I read. House speculates that Solomon gave the cities instead of the food he owed.² Carson wonders if Solomon's building projects were too lavish for his budget, thus he had to give away cities for the money to pay for them.³ Provan thinks that Solomon, an overlord, forced Hiram, a vassal, to give him gold against his will and then "rewarded" him with the worthless cities.⁴ DeVries imagines that this is a political, not commercial, exchange conducted with an "elaborate polite procedure." The cities in question were in dispute between him and Hiram, so Solomon gave them up in order to secure Hiram's ongoing good will. Hiram inspected them, pretended to be unhappy with them, and then paid up.⁵

Whatever the reason for the exchange, Hiram was unhappy with the results, yet not so unhappy that he stopped pursuing other business ventures with Solomon (1 Ki 9:27, 10:11, 22).

What does this section teach us about Solomon? As a king should be, he was engaged in international politics. And the text brings out the realism involved with diplomatic relationships: Not everyone is happy with every arrangement.⁶ Not even Solomon was above getting the better end of the deal.

15 And this is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon drafted to build the house of the Lord and his own house and the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem and Hazor and Megiddo and Gezer 16 (Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Gezer and

¹ ESV.

² House, 157.

³ Carson, 1 Ki 9:10.

⁴ Provan, 84-85.

⁵ DeVries, 132.

⁶ Davis, 97.

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; 17 so Solomon rebuilt Gezer) and Lower Beth-horon 18 and Baalath and Tamar in the wilderness, in the land of Judah, 19 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. 20 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— 21 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. 22 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. 23 These were the chief officers who were over Solomon's work: 550 who had charge of the people who carried on the work.

24 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 Millo.

Solomon's second pursuit was his building projects, many of which were defensive fortifications. For example, Hazor was a fortress that guarded the northern entrance into Israel. Megiddo was a fortress that controlled a trade route from Egypt. Gezer and Lower Beth-Horon guarded a road that went north to Jerusalem.⁷ Tamar was southwest of the Dead Sea, probably protecting a trade route to southern Arabia.⁸

Building projects required manpower, and Solomon used forced labor, as already mentioned in 1 Ki 5:13-18. The point of current passage is let the reader know that Solomon treated foreigners differently from his countrymen. Jewish laborers worked one month on, two months off (1 Ki 5:14), whereas the Canaanites remaining in the land were worked all the time; they were slaves. This practice did not originate with Solomon; in the days of Joshua, where the children of Israel did not drive out the Canaanites, they often turned them into forced laborers (Jos 16:10, 17:13; Ju 1:28-35).

What does the use of forced laborers tell us about Solomon? DeVries opines that Solomon believed in exploiting his fellow human beings, was quite willing to profit from violent expropriation,⁹ and was inhumane and xenophobic.¹⁰ But if this opinion is right, what does this say about God? He ordered the destruction of the Canaanites as punishment for their sins. It seems more likely that the author of Kings was not commenting on the practice of forced labor for the Canaanites; he was, however, commenting positively on Solomon's treatment of his own people.

⁷ Some of these fortifications are known from archeological excavations (DeVries, 132).

⁸ Davis, 98.

⁹ I admit I had to look this word up; it means to confiscate private property.

¹⁰ DeVries, 133.

An interesting note in the parallel text, 2 Chr 8:11, explains why Solomon's Egyptian wife got her own house: "My wife shall not live in the house of David the king of Israel, for the places to which the ark of the Lord has come are holy." House detects a note of irony here; Solomon is very concerned to keep the holy separated from the unholy, yet he will shortly be worshipping her gods.¹¹ Surely he never should have married her in the first place.

25 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.

Solomon's third pursuit was worship of God. Having built a temple to worship God, Solomon put it to its proper use. The three times a year are the three feasts at which every Jewish man was to participate (see Ex 23:14-17; 2 Chr 8:13). The final phrase in this verse is difficult to translate. It literally means, "he finished the house," but it seems to have the idea of fulfilling a vow or doing one's duty; a similar phrase is found in Ps 76:11. The NIV translates it, "and so fulfilled the temple obligations." If this understanding is correct, then this verse is saying that Solomon met every requirement of the Mosaic Law as it concerned temple worship. The parallel passage, 2 Chr 8:12-15, would seem to support this idea. On the other hand, this same verb was used in 1 Ki 7:51, where it literally meant Solomon finished building the temple. If this is what the author had in mind, then it means the temple wasn't truly finished until it was being used for its intended purpose, the regular worship of God as specified in the Mosaic Law. Either way, this paragraph tells us that Solomon was fully involved in the orthodox worship of the One God.

26 King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. 27 And Hiram sent with the fleet his servants, seamen who were familiar with the sea, together with the servants of Solomon. 28 And they went to Ophir and brought from there gold, 420 talents, and they brought it to King Solomon.

Solomon's fourth pursuit was international trade. Hiram may have been unhappy with the cities he got (1 Ki 9:13), but not so unhappy that he wouldn't enter into a business venture with Solomon. Connecting this text with 1 Ki 10:11-12, it seems that Solomon built ships, Hiram sailed them, and both kings reaped the profits. The exact location of Ophir is unknown, but Arabia, Somalia, and India have been suggested by various scholars.¹² Once again, we see Solomon doing exactly what a king should be doing.

Overall this section sounds a positive note about Solomon. He was the king and successfully engaging in king-like behaviors: politicking, building, worshipping, and

¹¹ House, 159.

¹² Davis, 99.

trading. Yet despite this, the warnings of 1 Ki 9:6-9 must remain in the reader's mind. "One may be enjoying a thoroughly kingly...career and yet end in utter ruin unless one take obedience to the first commandment as his very highest calling."¹³

¹³ Davis, 100.

If I had to preach on these verses alone, I don't think I'd be able to do it, because I am unable to find the theological and Christological message. If, however, I take a cue from Davis, I think I could. Davis takes chapter 9 to be a complete literary unit,¹⁴ thus the commands for obedience in the first half of the chapter provide the basis for understanding the second half. It seems that God's response to Solomon (1 Ki 9:1-19) provides both a conclusion for the dedication of the temple and a means to understand Solomon's various pursuits. Although I will not move God's response into this document, I will use it to interpret the text in this document.

Three Levels of History

1. Personal history – This is a story about the various activities of a king.
2. National History – This is a story about the various activities Israel's most successful and prosperous king.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about living righteously in the midst of a covenant relationship.

Jesus and the Gospel

This story reflects mankind's **need for redemption** through Jesus and the gospel.

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? Busily engaged in the every day activities of life, we tend to forget about God and forget to keep a God-centered perspective.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God's grace to meet our need? God's requirements for obedience are clear, and God reminds us what he wants us to do from time to time.

Outline

This outline is based upon the different activities of Solomon:

1. Solomon conducted foreign relations (1 Ki 9:10-14).
2. Solomon finished many building projects (1 Ki 9:15-24).
3. Solomon worshipped in the temple (1 Ki 9:25).
4. Solomon engaged in international trade (1 Ki 9:26-28).

Central Truth of the Story

The author of Kings wrote 1 Kings 1 in order to remind exilic Jews that God desires obedience in every activity of our lives.

¹⁴ Davis, 95.

Teaching Outline

God's people obey God in every activity of their lives, and God wants the people in this church to obey him in everything we do, no matter how mundane or ordinary. From this text in 1 Ki 9, we are going to see 4 examples of ordinary activities:

1. God wants us to be obedient in our relationships (1 Ki 9:10-14).
2. God wants us to be obedient in our hobbies (1 Ki 9:15-24).
3. God wants us to be obedient in our worship (1 Ki 9:25).
4. God wants us to be obedient in our business (1 Ki 9:26-28).

Works Cited

Carson, D. A., *New Bible Commentary*, 21st century ed., 1970.

Davis, Dale Ralph, *1 Kings*, Focus on the Bible, 2002.

DeVries, Simon J, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, 2nd ed., 2003.

House, Paul R., *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary, electronic ed., 2001.

Provan, Iain W., *1 and 2 Kings*, The New International Biblical Commentary, 1995.