

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Kings, Lecture 6

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F. 1. Solomon: Peace with a Flaw – Giving Away God’s Land

So “1” under “F” was “Peace with a Flaw, 1 Kings 9:10-25.” You recall what we discussed there in 1 Kings 9:10-25 is the act of Solomon in giving those twenty cities to Hiram. The question that raises is, which we discussed in the last class hour, does he really have any right to take part of the Promised Land that belonged to the tribe of Asher, you might say in a technical sense, but which ultimately didn’t belong either to Solomon or to Asher but which belonged to the Lord. It was the Lord’s land. Did he have any right to take that land and give it to a heathen king as collateral for a loan? That is basically what he did. When we go back to the Sinai Covenant, it emphasizes over and over that the land belongs to the Lord. The Israelites lived there and worked there but they could not just do with the land whatever they pleased. In fact, there was the concern that the land not even be sold out of the family line so that the family line that was within a tribe could keep its inheritance. It’s not Israel, or Solomon, or ultimately anyone that owned the land in the ultimate sense of the word; it was the Lord’s land. I think seen in that perspective, Solomon does something that is really not proper for the true covenantal king to do--to give away some of that land to a heathen king. So I think that even in that act you have an indication that this kingdom of peace is flawed. It’s not perfect. It’s not what it ought to be. It’s only provisional.

It’s not the final realization of the kingdom of peace; and as long as that ultimate kingdom of peace--which I think Scripture tells us one day will come and will be established--but as long as that is not here, then there are going to be forced relocations of people, evictions of people, people compelled to give up their residences, things of that sort, and history is full of that. You had that at this point in Israel towns being given over to a heathen ruler. You have that in recent Israeli history, as well, but I won’t get into that. as well.

Avoiding Disillusionment with the Church and Cynicism

You can take that “Peace principle” involved there and apply it in present time to the church where God’s people are not organized as a political entity with geographical territorial rights or anything of that sort. I think you have the same principle in a sense that in the church, even in the church of Christ where in a certain sense the peace of Christ is present, and where it rules and reigns certainly in the hearts of believers, and where it should reign and rule in relationships between believers you find also that there are flaws and cracks. It’s not perfect. To some people that becomes so much of a stumbling block that they become disillusioned with church, and some people go even as far as to not want anything to do with the church because it’s not perfect. I think what you have to understand is that as long as sin still exists, whether you’re in the Old Testament period or you’re in the New Testament period, you don’t have the perfect kingdom and peace in its completeness and wholeness. It has not arrived and is not here yet in its fullness.

So I think there is a balance needed as far as perspective for that kind of thing. I think you have to guard against idealistic expectations. In other words, we could wish and hope that everything were perfect here in this life and in this time, and people who lived in Solomon’s time wished that kingdom was perfect, but it’s not going to be perfect. We should have idealist expectations to expect it to be perfect--that’s one side of the coin. The other side of it is we shouldn’t become so cynical that evil things we see in the church or in society are simply accepted as things that we can’t do anything about. You sort of just ignore things because you realize things aren’t perfect and, therefore, when you see problems, when you see things that aren’t right, you just tolerate it.

You don’t want to become cynical about things. I think that latter position expects too little of the power of Christ and his Spirit. You can address problems, you can work for improvement, and there can be substantial improvement in situations. It’s never going to be perfect, but there can be a measure of that. The idealistic thing that always looks for perfection doesn’t take sufficient account of the fallen nature of man. I think you have to hold both those things in balance and perspective. And a Christian should have hope and

expectations that in spite of sin, Christ is at work in the world and things can be accomplished for good, and we should work in stride to bring that about. One should not be totally disillusioned when the results are not complete and final because they won't be until Christ himself comes and establishes that perfect kingdom of peace that Solomon didn't do and which no one else has done.

Now we're in this section that runs from verses ten through twenty-five, and we're speaking of peace with a flaw. Verses 15 and 16 give us almost a reverse situation. You read there, we're in chapter 9, "Here is the account of the forced labor King Solomon conscripted to build the Lord's temple, his own palace, the supporting terraces, the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer."

Gezer & Canaanite Pockets that Remained

And then you get a parenthetical statement in verse 16 after Gezer is mentioned, where it explains what Gezer is. Pharaoh King of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. He had set it on fire. He killed its Canaanite inhabitants and then gave it as a wedding gift to his daughter, Solomon's wife. Solomon rebuilt Gezer, he fortified it.

I mentioned something about Gezer, I think, back in chapter 3. I believe it's 3:1 where it says Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh, King of Egypt and married his daughter. I think I made a comment at that point that along with that marriage alliance Solomon had received this town Gezer. But you see, you have a reverse situation here. In the previous verses Solomon gave away twenty cities; here he receives one city. He gave away twenty cities to a heathen ruler, now he receives a city, Gezer, from an Egyptian pharaoh. Gezer is also a city that belonged to the territory of the Promised Land that belonged to the tribe of Ephraim.

During the conquest, you read in Joshua 10:33 that Gezer was defeated. Joshua 10:33 says: "Meanwhile, Hiram king of Gezer had come up to help Lachish, but Joshua defeated him and his army, until no survivors were left." So Gezer had been defeated, but apparently the city wasn't destroyed and hadn't been settled or occupied by the Israelites. Apparently things remained that way from the time of conquest up to the time of

Solomon; the city remained a Canaanite city.

Now, you might tend to think because of current events: that the Palestinian problem, so-called, in Israel is a modern problem, a recent thing. But I think you can, on looking in the biblical text, say that Israel has almost always had a Palestinian problem in one form or another. It existed in the Old Testament period as well because, just as today Arabs and Palestinians live in Jerusalem and other parts of Israel, particularly the West Bank and the Gaza strip, so in Solomon's days there were Jebusites in Jerusalem along with Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Hivites in various parts of the land. Non-Israelites were dwelling in the land of Israel and there were cities and areas where hardly any Israelites lived. They were occupied by these other peoples, and Gezer was one such city. From the time of The Conquest up until the time of Solomon, much of Israel was occupied by Canaanite inhabitants. So I think you could say there was a Palestinian problem at that time, as well. That situation was also not just a political issue, of course, but it had political implications.

But at its core, and far more importantly, I think there was a religious issue involved because the Old Testament tells us the Canaanites who remained in the land would become a stumbling block to Israel to lead them astray to follow after their heathen worship and heathen practices. The idols of these people seemed to have a strong attraction for the Israelites, and through the period of the judges you read repeatedly that Israel went astray after the religious practices of these Canaanites. So far greater than a political threat was the religious threat.

I think in Solomon's time the political issue as far as Gezer was concerned was not that serious, but the religious aspect continued to be a threat, not just with Gezer, but with other pockets of Canaanite inhabitants that were settled in the land.

Now, the only way really to solve that was to do what the Lord had said when they entered into the land at the time of The Conquest, and that was they were to destroy all of these Canaanites and all of these cities and their inhabitants; and if they didn't do that, then they would be led astray by their heathen religious practices.

The interesting thing with Gezer is it was conquered, and set on fire, and all its

inhabitants were killed, but that wasn't done by the Israelites; it was done by the Egyptian pharaoh we read there in verse 16. So that action against Gezer had nothing to do with carrying out the command of the Lord to utilize this "ban," as it's sometimes called, on the Canaanites. It was simply a military expedition by an Egyptian pharaoh, which was rather a common thing as these pharaohs marched up and down through the land of Canaan when they decided to do so. Undoubtedly, the booty that pharaoh got from that city he took back with him to Egypt. The ruins were left behind and he gives the ruins, strange as it might seem, as a dowry to his daughter when she marries Solomon. And so Solomon sets about, as we read in this verse, to rebuild the city and fortify it.

Queen of Sheba & God

The Queen of Sheba seems to be attracted by this because she visited Solomon; she was overwhelmed by what she saw and heard. So you read in verse 9 her statement: she says, "Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness." That's a good statement; it seems as she has good insight into what the purpose of kingship is: "He has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness."

Then you read she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. It's often the case on state visits; there is an exchange of gifts, and the tradition still goes on today. But it's in this connection that you get some comment about Solomon's wealth. You read in verse 13, "Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba all that she desired and asked for besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country." And then you read, "The weight of gold that Solomon received yearly was six hundred and sixty six talents." Now in the *NIV Study Bible*, there's a text note there that says that is about twenty-five tons, not including the revenue from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and governors of the land. What do you do with this gold? King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred bekahs of gold

went into each shield. A bekah is about seven and a half pounds. The king put them in the palace of the forest of Lebanon.

Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory, overlaid with fine gold. The throne had six steps, on its back a rounded top on both sides of the seats were arm rests. I'll come back to that throne, but if you go down a little bit further, to verse 21: "All king Solomon's goblets were gold; all the household articles in the palace of the forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's day."

Now, you see in this context of this visit of the Queen of Sheba, you have these statements about Solomon's wealth, and I think in those statements you can perhaps see something of a turning point. I think the wealth of Solomon is viewed generally as evidence of God's blessing; it's not something that *per se* is wrong. It's not criticized, but I think the question comes with what one does with riches. How do you use it? Do you use them in a simple way? To honor God? To advance his kingdom? Or do you use it for yourself?

Solomon & Deuteronomy 17 and Gold Accumulation

If you go back to Deuteronomy 17 to the law of the king, there are three things that a king of Israel was not to do: he was not to do: he was not to acquire great numbers of horses: We've already seen that Solomon did that. Second, he was not to take many wives, but Solomon did that. The third thing, he was not to accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. Now I want to come back to the first two things as we go further because they are mentioned as we go further. But here's the third thing: he was not to accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When you read verses 14 through 25, it's clear that Solomon is doing exactly what the law of the king in Deuteronomy said that he should not do.

And I think when you look at what he was doing with the silver and the gold you could say he's really not doing sensible things with his wealth. He makes two hundred large and three hundred small shields of gold to hang in his palace, its decoration out of

pure gold. All his goblets were gold; all his household articles were gold; nothing of silver because it wasn't good enough. I think you might say these are maybe judgmental matters. I think you might say for a king it might be appropriate to have a set of gold goblets for special occasions, something like that. But for ordinary household items, which seems to be what's talked of here, it's all solid gold. It seems like wealth is being used to build an image, to make an impression, to be like the other kings of the ancient world with all the splendor of the court.

Then you have the description of his throne that I said I wanted to come back to. "He made this great throne inlaid with ivory, overlaid with fine gold. The throne had six steps. On its back was a rounded top, on both sides of the seat were arm rests with a lion standing beside each of them. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it has ever been made for any other kingdom." It must have been quite a throne. It was elevated by six steps. So he sits high above his subjects, but the law of the king in Deuteronomy says the king was not to consider himself better than his brothers. So again you wonder if Solomon's attitude here has not violated that requirement of Deuteronomy 17 seeing that the throne suggests that he views himself as above his people.

There's an interesting textural variant with that phrase in verse 19: "The throne had six steps, its back had a rounded top." Where it says, "Its back had a rounded top," the Septuagint, that is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, says, "The throne had a calf's head on its back." Now, it's not clear that that's to be a preferred reading. It's sometimes hard to know when you have differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text which one contains the original, preferred reading. But it's at least possible that here's an indication of a drift into idolatry in the creation of this throne. You know that when you get to chapter 11, the next chapter, verse 5 where you read there that "He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites." So you know that at some point in his reign Solomon began to entertain ideas of worship of heathen deities. If he had a calf's head on his throne, that may be also some kind of symbol of idolatry that was incorporated right into his throne. That's not

clear because it's based on a Septuagint reading, not the Hebrew reading of the Masoretic text.

But in any case, I think when you go through this chapter and get this picture of the wealth and compare that to the statements of Deuteronomy 17, which were to govern the conduct of the kings of Israel, I think it's clear again that Solomon is not the true covenantal king. When you look for that ideal of the covenantal king, you do not find it in Solomon; you have to look somewhere else to the future.

I think ultimately you have to look to Christ. And of course, Scripture speaks of a throne in Revelation 22:1 where you read: "The angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb, flowing down the middle of the great street of the city. On either side of the river stood the tree of life." Solomon's throne was not the throne of the true king, the true king of peace. He fell short of that, but then our expectation has to go forward to the fulfillment of that ideal in Christ himself.

Solomon's Kingdom of Peace with Flaws [Syncretism]

I think the overall picture of Solomon's kingdom is a kingdom of peace because everyone could sit under their own vine and fig tree as it says. There were no wars and there was prosperity and, at least early on in Solomon's reign, Solomon himself followed the Lord, and so it was a time of great blessing. But things began to change and deteriorate. Solomon did not come on the throne with great wealth all at once. He accumulated it in a gradual process, and then he accumulated all these wives, again a gradual process. Then eventually his wives turned his heart away from the Lord to heathen worship. So by the end of his reign, the Lord sends a prophet to say: I'm going to take the kingdom from you and you'll only have one tribe left. I think what you see in that is that Solomon is the initial Son of David, and there is a picture in his reign of this kingdom of peace but it's an imperfect one and flawed one. This makes us realize that ultimately we must look elsewhere for the complete realization of the perfect, peaceful kingdom.

What you find in Solomon is trying to combine the worship of the Lord with the worship of these heathen deities, and that is something that continued to exist in Israel in king after king after king. It's not all attributed to Solomon's fall. But the kinds of things that Solomon did was also done by many others down the line. This thing called syncretism is right from the golden calf at Mount Sinai. They were trying to worship the Lord through the golden calf, so there was syncretism back then. That is the fundamental problem Israel had all through her history.

Let's take a ten minute break.

Transcribed by David Fogg
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt
Final edit by Dr. Perry Phillips
Re-narrated by Dr. Perry Phillips