

## 26<sup>th</sup> November: Reign of Christ

### 1 Kings 9

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#### A Devotional Sermon on First Kings 9\*

First Kings 9–11 details the closing years of Solomon’s life and recounts his backsliding. In chapter 9, God issued both a promise and warning in relation to worship (especially in terms of the Temple). The people were reminded that the building itself (i.e., the Temple) was not a mere guarantee of God’s blessing. Even today, God’s people may be tempted to trust in preceding endeavors or outward displays of success, rather than relentlessly pursuing ‘the upward call of God in Christ Jesus’ (cf. Phil 3:12–14).

Throughout the period of the monarchy, Israel trusted more in outward displays of religion as opposed to pleasing God by means of inner transformation (cf. Lev 20:26; Rom 12:1–2; 1 Pet 1:13–16). *Being a recipient of immense spiritual privileges can sometimes deceive one into thinking he or she is immune to God’s discipline.* First Kings 9 reminds us that immense privileges always enlarge responsibilities as opposed to lessening them.

When he had finished building the Temple and his own palace, Solomon had accomplished all he desired. At that moment in time, the Lord appeared to him again (1 Kgs 9:1–2); although, this occasion was different in that God did not ask Solomon what he wanted (cf. 3:5). God warned the king what would occur if he did not measure success by what God desired from him (9:3–9). *Similar to all God’s leaders,*

*Solomon was granted a choice, and that meant his responsibilities were significant, especially because his kingdom could reap the benefits of both economic and political independence. Nevertheless, as Jesus said, ‘From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more’ (Luke 12:48). For this reason, the writer of 1 Kings (9:10–10:29) addresses Solomon’s ability to govern the people of God.*

Solomon invested much to finance and maintain his building projects. To make recompense for his massive debt, ‘King Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee’ (9:11). Solomon invested greatly in military protection by building a network of regional fortress cities, which was costly because much finances and manpower were necessary. The cities were built by forced labor (9:15, 20–22; cf. 4:6). Moses and Samuel warned the people that a king would tax them excessively, in addition to demanding their labor for personal benefit, and would generally enrich the kingdom at others’ expense (Deut 17:16–17; 1 Sam 8:11–17). *Solomon’s kingdom was mighty, yet his personal ambitions were crushing to his people, and would eventually rupture into rebellion.*

First Kings 9:1 asserts that when King Solomon finished building the Temple and the royal palace, all he ‘desired to do’ was accomplished. Solomon began his building projects in the fourth year of his reign (6:1), and it took him twenty years ‘to build the two houses’ (9:10). If he ascended the throne at approximately twenty

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\* A Devotional Sermon on First Kings 9, proclaimed voluntarily, prior to the Administrative Session of the Georgia Public Service Commission.

years of age, then he was in his early forties when he accomplished all he ‘desired to do’. He was slightly beyond the halfway point of his forty-year reign (11:42).

*King Solomon was living the best years of his life*, as he was experiencing the pinnacle of his days as both a man and a king. As he reached halftime of his forty-year reign, Solomon was experiencing an enviable and unique experience of knowing that he had achieved all he ‘desired to do’. At the age of forty-four, Solomon was favored and especially gifted because he was responsible for the ‘Golden Age’ of Israel. History remembers Solomon as one of the most successful kings of his nation.

Slightly beyond the halfway point of his reign, *Solomon’s life appeared—by all standards—to be tremendously successful. Nevertheless, he never emerged from success to significance.* The second half of Solomon’s life was not a success. Solomon’s kingdom was remarkable, yet wholly superficial. Solomon failed as a king because he made compromises with God’s standards, which resulted in devastatingly enduring consequences.

Solomon’s life demonstrates several truths. *First, success has the inherent potential to become addictive.* Solomon accumulated greater fame and wealth, yet he lacked a compelling purpose and strategy for the future. His lifestyle was characterized by self-serving excess. *Second, success can become deceptive* because it may obscure one’s true being and circumstances. All the wealth that surrounded Solomon obscured the fact that his heart was drifting from God.

Near the end of his life, Solomon wrote that a life not focused upon God is meaningless and purposeless. ‘Vanity of vanities’, he remarked; all is utterly futile without the Lord God (Ecc 1:2). A greater accumulation of ‘stuff’ cannot substitute for a relationship with God. *Third, success can become illusory.* Certainly, no one reading the end of First Kings 10 would imagine that all the resplendent success would disappear within a few brief years, yet that is exactly what occurred.

*Evaluating our lives at halftime is especially urgent when experiencing tremendous success.* Of course, none of us can ‘boast about tomorrow’ because we ‘do not know what a day may bring forth’ (Prov 27:1), thus we should live each and every day circumspectly. Choices made in the present determine whether we can say, ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith’ (2 Tim 4:7); and, also will ascertain whether we hear the Lord remark, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave’ (cf. Matt 25:21).

*God’s eternal decree has always been to call a people—holy and separate—unto himself* from the world, and that this elect group would be saints (‘unique ones’) as they live their earthly lives—holy and separate—unto him. Therefore, a primary reason for ‘pressure’ exerted upon Christians is to produce perseverance, as the believer is dependent upon the Lord God (Rom 5:3–11). As proven character becomes evident in the Christian’s life, confidence in God is intensified and thus hope ‘does not disappoint’ (v. 5).

Apparent success can diminish what will genuinely endure, if we do not measure our lives by God’s standards. Authentic success can only be determined over longer periods of time. *Genuine success is measured only by perseverance*; in this sense, the life of the believer is not a sprint but a marathon. The aspiration and goal in life should be to persist in the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:10–14).

King David set a standard for obedience (e.g. Ps 32; 51). David’s sins are glaring faults upon an otherwise faithful servant. *The standard of King David is not perfection, but sin that is confessed, and when it is, there is repentance and wrong is made right.* The grace of God should never become an opportunity to sin because persistent disobedience displaces the longsuffering of God [cf. Rom 6:1–4; 1 Pet 4:17]. Christians are not perfect, but let us pray that when we are aware of our sin we would repent and finish well the work that God has entrusted to us.