

A Picture of the Church

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[0 : 00] Let's turn then to 1 Kings and chapter 4. And I suppose if I was going to take a text this evening, I just want to comment on some of the information that we have in 1 Kings chapter 4 by way of introduction, because what we're doing tonight is preparing for Solomon's greatest project.

And I want us to focus our attention particularly in our studies on Solomon on that great project, which of course, as you already know, was the building of the Lord's temple.

It's not for no reason that chapter 4 and chapter 5 give some comments on how it was prepared and the precursor or the preconditions that there were to this temple.

And chapter 4, I think, is an incredibly interesting chapter. I have to warn you that if you really want to get to grips with these chapters 4 to 7, we're going to have to try and picture ourselves, try and imagine what this structure would be like.

But I suppose chapter 4 doesn't refer to the building of the temple, but it just gives a kind of summary of the important features of Solomon's reign.

[1 : 38] And if we were going to take a text, I think it would have to be where it talks about the happiness and the peace that was enjoyed by the people at that time.

In verse 25, it's put like this, You might wonder at the very beginning of the chapter why there is this list of names given.

And what relevance does that have to our understanding of the Bible? After all, surely this is a detail, it's a historical detail. If you're into history, as many people are, then I guess that it might be a source of information.

But apart from that, why in the world is there all this large list of people who are included or who are involved?

For example, the chapter begins with Azariah, the son of Zadok, the priest. Well, it's no, that shouldn't be a surprise to us, why he would want to begin with by naming the priest.

[3 : 00] Then there were secretaries, then there was a recorder, then there was a commander of the army, then there were more priests, and then there was the king's confidant, and someone who was in charge of forced labor.

Then, it appears that Solomon delegated the task of making provision for his palace, for his house, to 12 leaders, 12 officers that were scattered all around the kingdom of Israel.

And their task was, once a month, they had to, or rather, once in a year, they had to provide for the palace. And that was no mean task, as you can well imagine, from what we read in verse 22, the provision for one day was 30 cores of fine flour.

And you'll find, if you're a mathematician, you can calculate the quantities of wheat, and meal, and oxen, by looking at the bottom of your ASV Bible, and there you have what a core was, in terms of a liter.

So it's very, it's very interesting, and what we're going to discover in this chapter, is that if you try and get away from the, try and take a step back from the precise detail, the vastness of the quantities that were used.

[4 : 11] And that is the whole point of these chapters. What we're going to see over these next few chapters is the sheer magnificence of the reign of Solomon.

Now, for you and I, reading these chapters, it might be a chore, because all it is is quantities and names, and the different details of each, and it does get a bit laborious, if all you're, that's why you have to take a step back, and you have to try and imagine what's going on.

The sheer quantities of what's going on here, the vastness, the magnificence, and the majesty, of this reign of Solomon, is actually really, it's quite breathtaking.

That's why in chapter 10, when the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, she was amazed. She just could not find words, to describe the reign of Solomon.

But we're going to see the same thing, as we try to imagine what the temple looked like. And I'm going to, when once we come onto the temple, we'll see that the temple, in actual fact, despite all the detail, the complexity of the details given to us in chapter 6, and chapter 7, it actually amounts to something relatively simple.

[5 : 22] It's just an extended, glorified version, of the tabernacle, that Moses built, in the wilderness. But what we're going to ask tonight, is this, why was it that Solomon, this glorious, majestic king, this hugely, massively, wealthy, wise, successful king, why would he want to pour, all his energies, and that's what he did, pour all his energies, into, this great building project?

Why was it that instead of, because if you look down the, ages of history, you'll find that more often than not, that kings, who managed to get away with as much as possible, they tended to, tended to draw, and attract wealth for themselves.

They tended to become rich, and successful, at the, at the expense of other people. They oppressed, the people, in their, now that this doesn't, didn't always happen, but more often than not, that's the way a monarchy worked.

That the poor became poorer, and the rich, the friends of the king, they became richer. But that's not what's going on, in this chapter at all. Solomon, the whole, the chapter focuses, on the wealth of Solomon, and the magnificence of Solomon, and yet, at the same time, there is a mood of happiness, and enthusiasm, throughout the whole country.

There doesn't seem to be, one single person, in Israel, that doesn't mean to say, that everything went smoothly, and easily, but there doesn't seem to be, one single person, that didn't enjoy, supporting, and giving, and working, for this man.

[6 : 59] And I, that's what these chapters, intend for us, to understand. They're not just details, but there's a mood, and there's a joy, there's an exuberance.

You can get the, they can get, you get the impression of, the willingness, of the people, because they loved Solomon, and they wanted to support him, as much as possible. And as we've seen before, this is an important thing, in terms of our understanding, of who Solomon was, in relation to Jesus Christ.

He, at this time, I, we have every reason, to believe that, he prefigured, and foreshadowed, the reign, of Jesus Christ. So, in these words, what you have, at the very beginning, of this chapter, is the people, who all gave, of themselves, and their energies, and their enthusiasm, and their joy, focusing upon this king.

And, what we have then, is a picture, of all those, who follow Jesus, who belong, to the kingdom of Jesus. And they, they want, they want nothing more, than to give their all, to him.

Their everything, to him. That's what it means, to follow Jesus, to give their all, and for him, to be the focal point, in their lives. Not because they're forced to, but because they want to, because their minds, and their hearts, have been changed.

[8 : 18] So here you have, an Old Testament prophecy, an old, a picture, in the Old Testament, an actual reign, which prefigured, and foreshadowed, the reign, of Jesus Christ.

And in the Bible, you have, glimpses, of that reign, in the Old Testament. You have places, and times, and occasions, that look forward, to a day coming, when, the reign of Jesus, will extend, to the whole, world.

And where people, will come, to know Jesus, and to, to follow him, and to be part, of that kingdom. Now here are people, who were given responsibility, of, there are people, who are named, named, and there are people, who, many more people, who took part, in this massive program, of provision, for the king, who are not named.

And we have to remember that. But even those who are named, they mean nothing to us whatsoever. Not a single thing to us. Apart from those, who were priests, and those who were the sons-in-law, of the king, the other names, they just appear once, and that's it.

What is the point, of all these names? Well first of all, it's important, that the Bible, be regarded, as a historical document. It is important, that the Bible, be recognized, in terms of its authenticity.

[9 : 42] And here is one more, piece of evidence, because we're coming, because these names, have been given to us, of real people, who actually lived, in the ages of history, who made up this reign, and who supported this reign.

And if anyone, is ever trying to, as a historian, trying to, answer the question, did this really happen or not? One of the questions, you always ask is, who was involved?

What kind of, records are there, of this having, truly, actually, historically happened? Here, in this chapter, is a record.

Now, between chapter 4, and chapter 7, all you have is a record, of all the activities, and the details, and the complexity, and the architecture, of the temple, but all of that, goes, to prove, the authenticity, of what took place.

Because God, is not just telling us, there was a vast kingdom, but here are the people, who were involved. God is not just telling us, that Solomon built, a magnificent temple. He's telling us, what the temple looked like.

[10 : 49] He's telling us, how long it took to build. He's telling us, what it was designed like. He's telling us, what it looked like. He's giving us, all the intricate details, of us, so that we might be confident, and so that we might be, more and more confident, in the truth, of the Bible.

Now, I'm not saying, that the Bible is, only a historical book. It's not. It's God's word to us. Yet, it is, a historical, authentic account, of what took place, at that time, involving, real people.

So, I hope tonight, we are confident, in the Bible, as God's word, as the accurate, account, of what took place, in those times. I hope also, that we're impressed, by the fact, that Solomon delegated, part of his wisdom, was to delegate, the responsibility, of upholding, this massive organization, both in terms, of the building, of the temple, later on, the building, of the palace, and the provision, which is made, for the king, and his household, and all those, who belong to him, as well as, the ongoing government, of the kingdom, of Israel.

And I don't think, any one of us, would deny for a moment, the fact that, that was a hugely, complex, complex. And here is Solomon, having known very little, about how to run, a government.

He admits that, in chapter three, or rather chapter two, he admits that. Now God has given us, such wisdom, the country is running, well, and happily, and efficiently, and it can only do so, by the involvement, of people who are willing, to do so.

[12 : 29] Now isn't that, a picture of the church? The church, which is, which is ruled, and reigned, by the Lord Jesus Christ. But, the church comprises, of people, who are made willing, and who do, what they do, out of love.

And who are committed, to the Lord Jesus, because he first loved them, not because they have to, but because, they love to serve him. Isn't that the case? I hope tonight, that you love to serve Jesus.

I hope you're prepared, to do anything at all, and everything, and to put all your talents, and your, and your energies, and your life, into serving him, in whatever place, he has put you.

And I want us to notice, the enthusiasm, of this. I want us, also to notice, that these are, these are men, and I'm sure women as well, many women, who were all involved, in it, as one united, people of God.

And it is when, God's people are united, it's when a church is united, when it's a congregation, is united, that we can, come together, in the service of Jesus, and that when, we can, that we can, serve him, and glorify him, as he, as he, wants us to.

[13 : 48] So the people, the first, first thing that impresses us, about this chapter, is the people, in the chapter. The second thing, that impresses me, about this chapter, is the promise, that is fulfilled, in, the chapter.

The promise, that is fulfilled, in the chapter. And that promise, breaks up into, three elements, throughout the rest, of the chapter. First of all, there is the happiness, of the people, of God's, in God's kingdom.

Verse 20, Judah and Israel, were as many, as the sand, by the sea. What does that remind you of? It's not just a statement, of how many there were, in the kingdom.

It's a theological, statement. It brings us back, to the time, when hundreds of years, earlier, God promised, Abraham, to bless him, and his family.

And that the day, would come, when, his seed, his family, would be as many, as the sand, of the sea. Now, of course, that wasn't literal. What God, was impressing, upon Abraham, then, was that, take a look, at the stars, he said.

[15 : 05] Can you count them? Of course he couldn't count them. It's impossible to count the stars. Can you count the grains of sand, on the seashore? Of course you can't. It's impossible. Neither was it possible, to count the number of people, there were, in Israel, at that time.

And all of this, had grown. All of these people, had grown. Now, here's the first element, in that promise, that here, was proof, living proof, that God, is true, to his word. Now, you remember, how impossible, it was for God, to keep that promise. Abraham, was 75 years old, when he came, from Ur of the Chaldees, into Canaan. And he was, 99 years old, when God promised him, one more time, that he would have a son. And he was, 100 years old, when he actually, had a son. Sarah, his wife, was 90. It was just as impossible, then, for a 90 year old, to have a son, as it is now. And yet, that's exactly, what happened. Against all hope, Abraham believed, in hope. And God, created from, this one man, says Paul, as many, a company of people, as many, as the stars, of the sky, or as the sand, and the sea, innumerable. [16:13] And here we have, living proof, that God, is true, to his word. God, is always, true to his word. When God, comes to us, in the person of Jesus Christ, and he says, he who comes to me, I will in no wise, cast out.

God, is true, to his word. When God, comes to us, in the person of Jesus Christ, and says, I will raise him up, at the last day, he is true, to his word. When God, comes to us, in Jesus, and says, he who believes in me, shall have everlasting life, he is true, to his word. And we go back, to the old, how do we know, he's true to his word? Because the Bible, is full of it. Living proof, that God, always keeps, his promise. First of all, in the people, that were, in Israel, at that time.

And these, these men, who are named here, are not just men, who happened to be born, in that family, but men, who loved, the Lord. Well, we'd like to think, in any case, that they loved, the Lord, along with their, their families, and along with those, who belong to them. But then the second element, of that promise, is the place. This was the place, of Jerusalem. But I want you to notice, that in verse 24, the chapter tells us, that Solomon had dominion, not only over Jerusalem, not only over the bounds, or the borders, of Israel at that time, for he had dominion, over all the region, west of the Euphrates, from Tifsa, to Gaza, over all the kings, west, of the Euphrates, and he had, and the kings, west, of the Euphrates. [17:51] Now what that tells us, is that, that Solomon's kingdom, extended beyond, his own family, his own family, of the tribes of Judah, of the tribes of Israel, rather.

And that his influence, had extended into, across the borders, and other people, were coming, people of other nations, and other languages, and tribes were coming, and other, other countries were coming, and bringing tribute, to him, because they recognized, the importance, of his reign. And again, they brought tribute, because they wanted to, honor him, as their king. There's again, this note, this, this mood of enthusiasm. People wanted to, and you know, they'll do that, when the king is popular, won't they? And he was so popular, and so majestic, and so wonderful, that people wanted to be, part, of, that kingdom. It's one thing, to force somebody, into something. It's another thing, to draw somebody. You know, that's a picture, of the gospel. The gospel, never, forces, a single soul, to follow Jesus.

[18:59] Nobody, follows Jesus, by force. But people, follow Jesus, when, they are made willing. That's why the Bible, tells us, a willing, the psalm tells us, a willing people, in your day of power, will come to you.

And that's exactly, what's happening, in this chapter. People, not just in Israel, but people outside, of Israel, where Solomon's, influence has extended. They've heard of him.

We're going to see that, in chapter 10, later on, the queen of Sheba, coming all the way, from Africa, because she's heard of him. She wants to come. She wants to be part, of this great movement.

A great movement, that foreshadows, the gospel, the kingdom of Jesus, where Jesus is the king, and where Jesus, is on the throne.

And you know, all the way through the Bible, the Bible promises that, we saw that, to some extent, in the coming of the wise men, to Jesus, with their gifts, wise men, from the east, having come from, outside of Israel, to, to fall down, and worship, the Lord Jesus, the baby Jesus, in Bethlehem, and to present to him, their gifts, their tribute, their tribute, because they honored him, and because they recognized him, as their king.

[20:17] And the Bible tells us, and I believe this, with all my heart, that the day will come, when on a world wide scale, the influence of Jesus, will be so vast, and so extensive, that people will come,

in thousands, and in millions, willingly, to bow down, and worship him, because they want to.

I believe that, that is what the Bible, that all the way through the Bible, that we, that we have this promise, that the gospel, will take hold, in people's eyes, you might say, well, it doesn't look very like it, does it?

I mean, look at, look at the West, what kind of influence, is the gospel having in Scotland? What kind of influence, is the gospel having in England, in Britain? What kind of influence, is the gospel having, in the affluent West?

It seems to me, as if the opposite is happening, that in the past, hundreds of people, came to church, thousands of people, came to church, but now, all of that is, on the way, and it's on the way out. Christianity is, is the least popular religion, that there is, it appears.

God can change that, in a moment. Do you believe, today, that the gospel, is the power of God, to salvation? Do you believe, that God is able, to change people's hearts?

[21 : 42] Well, if you believe, that he can, why don't you believe, that he will? Especially, when it's, it's written, all over the, all over the scripture. What else does Jesus mean, when he tells us, in the Lord's Prayer, that, thy kingdom come.

What are we praying for, in the Lord's Prayer? He commanded his disciples, say, this is part of the Lord's Prayer, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

What does that mean? Have you ever, have you ever stopped, and wondered, what does that request mean? What does that prayer mean? Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is, in heaven.

Some people say, well, that means heaven, when there'll be a new heaven, and a new earth. does it? Does it? I can see, there is a possibility, that's what it may mean, but if you take, if you take the prayers, and the hopes, and the, and the anticipations, of the Psalms, into account, in actual fact, you get a picture, of a whole earth, why is it so impossible, for God, to bring people, in their thousands, and in their millions, to recognize, and to worship Jesus?

Why do we think, it's so impossible? Why is your faith, so small? Why should we not, be praying for the, for God, to do something great, in the world?

[23 : 02] We might never see it. Shout for joy, Psalm 66, you sing, we sing all this, so much, and yet, we don't know, what we're singing, shout for joy, to God, all the earth, sing the glory, of his name, all, the earth, you ever stop, when you're singing, those well-known words, and you think, what do I mean, when I'm singing those words, is this just a wish, I wish, that all the earth, would sing praise to God, the Bible is not, in the business of wishing, the Bible is in the business, of promising, and when we sing this, shout to God, all the earth, I believe that's a promise, when you pray, to God, for something, according to his word, which is what we're doing, when we're singing that psalm, you are praying something, that God will answer, all the earth, Psalm 100, all people, that on earth, do dwell, all people, that on earth, do dwell, make a joyful noise, to the Lord, all the earth, and then, it would take me all night, to go through, all the places, in the Old Testament, and places in the New, where, there are references, to the great hope, the great promise, that God will touch, people's lives, and that the earth, will be changed, and that brought, under the power, of the gospel, now some of you, may want to take this up, with me, at some later stage, because I know, that there's more to it, than that, but that's, my, firm belief, that the gospel, is by no means, a spent force,

God is able to do, more than we can ask, or even think, but the third element, and I'm going to stop with this, the third element, in this promise, is the peace, of the promise, look at what it says, for he had dominion, over all the region, west of the Euphrates, and Judah, and Israel, lived in safety, from Dan, even to Beersheba, every man, under his vine, and under, his fig tree, every man, under his vine, and under his fig tree, now that doesn't mean, that every single household, had one vine, and one fig tree, that's again, a figurative way of speaking, of the contentment, describing the contentment, and the real, lasting happiness, that there was, under the reign, of Solomon, it was a happiness, which didn't always, hanker for something more, it was a happiness, that didn't rest, in my selfish pleasure, but it was a happiness, that rested, in belonging, to this wonderful kingdom, with this wonderful king, reigning over us, who reflected, the wonder, of the true, and the living God, and we tonight, can have that same, contentment, and ultimate happiness, by knowing, and trusting, and loving,

Jesus Christ, and by so doing, belonging, to his kingdom, which will never, end, let's pray, our father, in heaven, bless these, these, thoughts to us, we ask Lord, that we will go away, with, with a

further, and a greater hunger, for your word, and we ask Lord, that you will, implant it, into our hearts, and may your word, stay with us, and grow within us, and bear, great fruit, in our lives, as we ourselves, like these men of old, sought to serve Solomon, as we serve, and make provision, for the gospel, in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his name, Amen.