

God does His will through people, across history

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 October 2018

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] To turn again, please, to 1 Kings chapter 5, and as you do that, let me remind you where we are. We're at peace in the kingdom, something which only God could achieve.

That was chapter 4, peace in the kingdom, peace on every side, and blessing to follow that peace, or rather to accompany the peace which God gave.

Now that we enter into chapter 5, God is beginning to keep a promise. Now there's something here which I think will do good to all of us, seeing that we believe in the promises of God.

We've even sung about the promises of God this evening. And we all know that if it is a promise, that is, it's still a promise, then it's still something to happen in the future.

It no longer continues to be a promise if it's been fulfilled. Okay, we understand that once the promise has been fulfilled, then it was a promise, it was fulfilled, and now we live in the reality of God keeping his word.

[1 : 04] And this chapter for me is a wonderful reassurance of a promise keeping God. More importantly, of how God actually goes about keeping his promises.

So the first thing to notice is that there is peace on every side, and this is a result of God's blessing. Therefore, it is the most appropriate time for God to fulfill his promise of building the temple that he said would be built through Solomon.

David had the desire to build, but God said no. Solomon was the one who would build the temple. The thing to notice there, which we might dip into again as we go, is that David's desire was completely in line with what God actually wanted.

There was no conflict there at all. The only point of difference was that David wanted to do it, and God had appointed Solomon to do it. The point to really focus in on is that when God has a will, he chooses who will do what at what point throughout history.

So if you've ever asked yourself, it would have been nice to have been born in the 1950s or the 1920s or the 1850s, perhaps not the 1850s.

[2 : 25] But, you know, it would have been nice to have been born at this particular time in this particular place. You know, if you've ever, you know, sort of wondered that, perhaps you haven't, perhaps it's just me.

And then you think, well, okay, fair enough, but why was I born in the time that I was? Why this period for me? Well, I don't think that God sort of haphazardly does anything.

I think everything has its appointment and everything has its place. So I think the way to read David's desire and God's choice of Solomon is simply timing, and simply in God's timing, God chooses his people to do different things.

I don't think it's got anything to do with Solomon being a better builder than what David was, a man of war, or any of those type of things. God appoints certain people to do certain things at certain points in time.

And that's it. It's as simple as that. You know, I think it was C.S. Lewis said that it's only the foolish person who compares the moon and the sun and says which one's better.

[3 : 38] Well, that type of comparison is completely redundant because they both serve an individual purpose, the purpose for which God created them. And I think throughout history, you know, it's easy to compare people even within a church, but I think it misses the point entirely because God doesn't compare.

He rather positions in order that that person fulfills what they do. Now, the interesting thing about promises, and I think this is where the encouragement comes from, is that some of God's promises can actually cause you to laugh.

And once God fulfills that promise, it's a bit like him saying, and who's laughing now? Okay? An example of this would be Abraham and his wife Sarah. God promised them that they would have a child, and you'll know that Sarah, or Sarai at the time, laughed.

She laughed. Why would she laugh? Why would she laugh at a promise of God? Why would you do such a thing? Well, what you do is you take into consideration everything that needs to happen in order for that to happen, i.e. have a child.

And because she was very old, as was her husband very old, she ruled it out. There's just no way that that's going to happen. She looked at everything that was currently available to her, her age, her health, her husband's age in health, and what was possible from her human understanding and point of view, and then ruled out what God could actually do.

[5 : 08] So she laughed. And God gave her a child, and in giving the child, he kind of said, very gently, and who's laughing now? Okay? Or you're not laughing anymore. And that's the way to understand the promises of God.

You've got to understand it from the point of view that if God promises it, then he will also bring about the means of achieving that promise. Sarah laughed because while she understood the promise, she couldn't get her head around how God would actually do it, how God is actually going to be able to work out all the things that need to happen in order for that to happen next.

So she laughed the promise off. In much the same way, what we have in 1 Kings 5 is not the fulfillment of the promise, because the temple is not yet built.

Okay? You've got stone cutters. You've got timber cutters. You've got everything being pulled together, but you've not got any temple. There's no temple being built. All you've got is the preparations, or rather the beginnings of it.

And that there is God pulling everything together. Here we are. God is bringing together everything that needs to be brought together in order for a temple to be built.

[6 : 25] Woodcutters, stone, timber, a deal, a treaty, a trade-off between two kings. So here's the summary of how it all unfolds. Hiram is the king of Tyre, and Solomon has now been made king, which Hiram recognizes.

Hiram loved Solomon's father, David, verse 2. And that seems to be the foundation of this relationship. The reason why Solomon has this relationship with Hiram, and Hiram just so happens to be in the position of being able to provide stone and timber, seems to have come about because of the father's relationship with Hiram.

Hiram loved David. So Solomon has it easy in one sense, in that the relationship's already there, okay, because this is how God works.

This is how God brings everything together. Everything's lined up just so that it's ready to fit into its place so that God can then do the next thing. Verse 4, we read that the kingdom is at peace, complete peace, and neither is there any kind of misfortune.

Misfortune is just a very English way of saying that everything is held together within the providence of God. We don't believe in fortune. We don't believe in the fortunate, or that was unfortunate.

[7 : 46] We may use that terminology. We may even use the terminology of chance, like the Bible uses the terminology of chance. But that is simply to draw a distinction between what we know and what God knows.

In other words, we may say things, oh, there's no chance of that happening, or what's the chance of that happening? And that's just that we just don't see the outcome. God knows the beginning from the end.

He knows the role of every dice and the outcome of every dice. And so when we hear people say, oh, it's lucky it landed there, well, luck had nothing to do with it. And everything came to the ordained plan of God.

So this kind of misfortune is just a very English way of saying that in God's providence, everything is at peace. Everything is, there's nobody's, nobody's having any kind of upset whatsoever.

And this is a strange position to be in because, you know, we live in a world where there's a lot of, to use this word, misfortune. Another thing to notice is that because everything is pulling together, everyone seems to be happy with each other.

[8 : 58] Solomon's relationship with Hiram leads to the supply of building the temple. Hiram, verses 7 through to 11, comes up with this deal with Solomon of how it's to take place, the arrangement.

If you want this, okay, and I want this in return, okay? We both want something. You give me what I want, and I will give you what you want.

Well, the thing I want to do here is pause for one second and say, well, there, it must be God's will, right? Everyone's at peace. Everything is going well.

Therefore, it must be God's will. And that would be, that would be true if only you had this passage to go on. And sometimes people rule out God's will the moment opposition comes.

As if to say, well, because we've got opposition, it can't be God's will. Well, what about Nehemiah? Nehemiah built the walls of Jerusalem, and he went to work with a trowel in one hand and a sword on his side.

[10:02] Okay? Nehemiah built the walls of Jerusalem through opposition. He built the walls of Jerusalem in opposition. Was it God's will for the walls to be built? Yeah. It was absolutely, was it to God's praise and glory that the walls were to be built?

Yes. But did he have to do it through opposition? Yeah. So the idea that we can say, well, this is definitely God's will because everything's at peace. Well, that's certainly true.

But it's also true that it doesn't always work out that way. Sometimes you have to do God's will through opposition.

And so we shouldn't run away with the idea that it's only God's will if everything goes our way. That it's only God's will if everything goes our way. That's just not how biblically the picture unfolds.

In 2 Samuel 7, you'll remember, or here's the reminder, is the promise that God made to David, that David would not be the one to build the temple for the Lord, but God desired that Solomon would do it.

[11:08] David was a man of war. And that's indicated here in the fact that David has enemies on all these sides. Verse 3, and those enemies the Lord put under the soles of his feet in the time of David.

So David was the one whom God used to do all the fighting, and Solomon was the one whom God used to do the building.

Okay, it was too much for one man to do both, and God used David to do the fighting, and God used Solomon to do the building. And that's why we have the peace in what we do.

The reason why Solomon lives in peace is partly due to the fact that God used David to do all the fighting, to get rid of all the enemies. Now, it says here clearly in verse 3 that God is the one who did it.

Of course, of course. But God is the one who did it through David. Okay, David had blood on his hands in more ways than one. But David had blood on his hands because he was appointed by God to be that type of warrior king.

[12:18] Okay, he fought with the sword. That was who David was. Solomon, well, he's more of an organizer here and the builder of a temple. Why? Because he's more of that type of man?

No, because that was his appointed role by God. David has been used by God in one way, and Solomon is being used by God in a completely different way.

Why? Here's why. Because God's will is being fulfilled through different people at different times, living in different ages and stages of history.

In other words, the way to look at this is very, very simple. That God knows the beginning from the end, and he knows everything that needs to happen to get from the beginning to the end.

Every little detail is taken care of by God. And God's people understand more than anybody else in the world, or at least they should understand more than anybody else in the world, that they fit into those details.

[13:18] Okay, what about my desires? What about what I want to do? What about all the things that I like doing? Well, God is able to answer all of those as he goes with any difficulty.

All of those have been factored in. The fact that I like mint ice cream rather than strawberry ice cream, okay, is unknown to me why I like one rather than the other one.

But it just so happens to be the case that I do. Okay? Why? I have no idea. Does it take God by surprise? Completely not. But the fact that I'm a pastor and I was a roofer, does that take God by surprise that somehow God is all of a sudden happy with me because I decided no longer to be a roofer but to be a pastor?

No. Why? Because, one, I was quite happy as a roofer, and God chose me to come into the ministry. Okay. Well, what about my will? Well, it's amazing how that when you follow God, then

suddenly his will becomes yours.

Now, it doesn't always, and that's why we have a conflict of wills. Okay? There is nothing worse than for the Christian to experience my will rubbing up against God's will.

[14:29] Okay? And that is, that's one of the things that I think we have to understand as we live a Christian life. That what we're meant to see here in David and Solomon is two men being used by God for what God wants to be done on earth.

And we think, because we're not a David or a Solomon, that must be different for us. No, it's no different for you. You're as important as David and Solomon. Solomon, you may not get to do what David or Solomon did, but you're going to be used by God to do his will in exactly the same way. But we tend to think it's one rule for David and Solomon and one rule for us because we're not David or Solomon. We're not as great as that. But who made them great?

And why do we think they're even great in the first place? Right? It's simply because they've been recorded. Now, if it was not recorded, you would not know who they are. And Hebrews 11 speaks of a number of people whose names have never been written down in the book.

And yet, I've done a number of things which God remembers and God has ordained for them to do. None of them have been recorded. They're not famous for anything other than the fact that God knows what they have done.

[15:40] And you are those people. You are those people. So, to understand it in a way where you are comfortable with it, where you're comfortable with it, then when your will rubs up against God's will, okay, all that is is you coming to terms with how God is organizing your life.

And it's, at times, it's extremely uncomfortable. But God will do the same with your life as he does with King David, as he does with King Solomon. Why? Because in God's eyes, you're not any less or any less important than King David or King Solomon.

Okay? What you do is also taken notice of by God. It's also recorded. And this is one of the key things that we actually learn in passages of scripture that are narrative-based.

In other words, God's will being done through people. You know? And we, if we're not careful, we read the Bible as if it's some kind of movie script and someone's got the central star role.

And that's not the way the Bible is meant to be written. And I think, you know, apart from, do you remember those old Jesus of Nazareth films?

[17:00] I forget the name of the guy who made them, the originals. Yeah, Piercing Blue Eyes. What? Robert Powell. Yeah, do you remember? I can remember watching them and thinking, do you know, I want to be just like him.

And not thinking, not thinking that he was portraying Jesus. Why? Because I got carried away in the narrative of the story that I actually forgot that actually what's being portrayed here is scripture, not a story, where there is an actor.

And we all ought to be, I lost the plot. And I think sometimes that, you know, when we imagine a role within God's story, we think that there is somehow a star role, a leading role, second fiddles. That's just not the case. That's not the case. The way that God organizes the world is that all things work together. And all things work together, meaning that we all have our place and serve the purpose of God in the way that we do it.

So the Christian farmer is serving exactly the way God wants him to. Now, he may desire to be something completely different.

[18:15] But if God is determined, ordained for him to fulfill that role, then that's the one he is to fulfill. And I think that that is what we're meant to understand when we read of great characters, we could say.

I've even heard books, you know, great characters of the Bible. There's a number of great ones that are not even mentioned. What about all the missionaries that have died on the mission field whose names that you do not know?

What about all of those people? Are they somehow not doing God's will because it's not been written down? No, of course not. So the principle here is very straightforward.

That God's will is always accomplished throughout time using different people, including the 20,000 men, the 10,000 men, the 30,000 men that Solomon uses to build the temple, whose names you do not know.

Yet they are fulfilling the purposes of God. Okay. What about King Hiram then from Tyre? Clearly not one of God's people.

[19 : 22] But you'll notice in verse 7 that he recognizes and blesses the Lord. He has a relationship with David, as we've seen.

He loved David. Now he strikes up this relationship with David's son and he blesses the Lord. This reminds me of probably my favorite person in the Bible.

I don't really have favorite people in the Bible, but this one. It's the Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15. The thing is, she's probably one of the best teachers in the entire Bible, apart from Jesus, of course.

Why? Because this is what she said. The Syrophenician woman is, of course, from Phoenicia. The king of Hiram is from Tyre.

The Sidonians, who are the woodcutters here in verse 6, are from Sidon. Jesus, in Matthew 15, goes into Tyre and Sidon. Tyre, king of here.

[20 : 24] And Sidon, where you've got the Sidonians, which are the woodcutters. And the woman, in Matthew 15, is the Syrophenician woman. Which means that she comes from that part of the country.

The Phoenician coast. She is a Syrophenician. That's who she is. And then she says this to Jesus. Of course, not one of God's people, not a Jew, by any way.

And she says, yes, Lord. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. One of the best statements, I think, in the whole of the Gospels. No doubt about it.

What is she saying? Well, she understands that God's blessing is not limited to God's people. She understands that God's blessing is for all people. And Jesus almost, almost doesn't even pay any attention to her at one stage.

He doesn't completely ignore her. But he's sort of, sort of, okay, right? And she wants her daughter healed. And the moment she makes this statement, yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.

[21 : 28] Why? What is she saying? Not even the disciples are that smart. Well, she's saying, I know that the blessing of God is not restricted to God's people alone.

But it is extended to all others through you. And Jesus says to her, your daughter will be healed. Because of her faith, her daughter would be healed.

It's just remarkable. And I think that every time I think of King of Hiram and King of Tyre, I think of the Syrophenician woman who also understood the blessing of the Lord.

Hiram blesses the Lord. He speaks well of the Lord. He understands God's blessing. It seems upon Solomon as king that God is with Solomon. But he speaks well of Solomon's God.

And he has this trade deal with him. So here's the arrangement. And here's the thing to notice.

Because if we think that Solomon up to this point has been playing nicely, which he has, Solomon is not stubborn at this point.

[22 : 34] But he is acting in wisdom. So here's the arrangement. The arrangement's fairly simple. We all know that Solomon needs timber and stone to build the temple for the Lord.

Hiram recognizes that there has to be some kind of trade-off. And so he says to Solomon, okay, you can have everything you desire. And you can have everything you desire in exchange for everything that I desire.

Okay. So there's the trade-off. Solomon, however, ignores Hiram. Because Hiram has already said, what I'll do is I'll get all these log cutters.

And I'll send it down to you. And you can receive it the other end. Okay. Leave it with us. You can pay me afterwards. Okay. And we will just send it down to you the other end.

And Solomon, having heard what Hiram has said, pays no attention. Instead, you'll notice, verse 13 onwards, he decides to send 30,000 men up into Lebanon.

[23 : 37] 10,000 a month so they can spend a month up there working, two months at home with their families. So that they can go and work. Solomon uses the wealth that God has given him to make this trade.

And he also uses the wisdom that God has given him to make this trade. In other words, Solomon pays attention to what he needs to pay attention to. But then he ignores what he needs to ignore.

Hiram says, I think it should be done this way. And Solomon says, I'm sending men up to you.

Okay. I know that you want to send stuff down. But I'm sending stuff up to men up to you.

He changes the arrangement. Now, Hiram, on the other hand, does nothing about this. You don't hear him complain. You don't, well, hang on a minute, Solomon. That's not what we agreed. No.

Solomon says, this is the way it's going to be.

And Hiram is absolutely silent. Perhaps the text is silent, but Hiram is silent. Well, whatever the case, Solomon does what he does in order to get the temple built.

[24 : 43] God promises that the temple will be built through Solomon. And this must include the means as well as the end. In other words, I'm sending men up. Why? Because it's the temple of the Lord.

I'm sending men to you. Why? Because the Lord is the one who will build the temple through me. Okay. So, this is my involvement here. Well, here's a few key considerations I think we should consider as we move on.

The first is this. What happens and why it happens? What happens and why it happens? Now, this is what I mean. Whenever you read the promise of God, whenever you read that God does something, the difficulty is that you get caught up in the details and lose track of the actual promise. So, we say things, this needs to happen in order for that need to happen. I need this in order for to do that. Or this must happen first and that must happen next. And we get so caught up in how things should happen as we see them that we lose track of the fact that God is actually going to do it.

And Christians, in the same way, throughout church history for the last 2,000 years, read the New Testament and go, Christ is coming back because this is happening, that is happening.

[25 : 58] And they draw together all of these conclusions. And for the last 2,000 years, they've all been wrong. They've all been wrong because Christ hasn't returned as yet. Now, why does that happen?

Well, I think it happens for one very simple reason. And that is we misinterpret the signs that we see. And Jesus said this very thing to the people of his day, that you can read the weather, but you can't interpret the signs of the times.

You ought to be able to, being my people. But you just cannot seem to do it. The same for Christians. We know that God says certain things in his word, and then we don't see them.

And we try and perhaps sometimes pull things together. Well, this must be the way God would do it. So I'm just going to give him a helping hand. And we get so caught up in the details that God actually does it a completely different way.

In fact, we're all like Sarah. You know, we all laugh at some of the things that God says. And then God is the only one laughing in the end.

[27 : 05] We must remember that the reason why there is a peaceful kingdom and the only reason why there's a possibility of the temple being built is because everything that God has done so far. We shouldn't get so lost in the details to forget that God knows how to fulfill his own promises.

God knows how to fulfill his own promises. And that concerns your future, my future, the future of God's church on earth. He knows how to fulfill everything. And so we shouldn't be too worried about the details and where they all fit in.

2,000 years, Christians have been saying that Christ is going to return. And for 2,000 years, they're getting a little closer in their accuracy. Okay? Just a little bit closer. Okay?

We're a little bit closer than what those who said it 2,000 years ago. But we don't know what's going to happen 500 years from now. We have no idea what might happen 2,000 years from now.

And someone is thinking at this very moment, because I said 500 years or 2,000 years, that, what, does he not think that Christ can come before then? Well, do you think he can? Okay?

[28 : 10] Are we just going to have a, just a banter here? Okay? You know as well as I do, I don't know if Christ will come back tomorrow or not. But you also know as well as I do, that you don't know whether it will be 2,000 years or 5,000 years from now.

Okay? And a lot can happen in that time. And one of the key considerations here is that we should never get caught up in the details when it comes to God fulfilling his own promises.

All that we are responsible of doing is doing the things that God has revealed to us in the time that God has given us to do it. David had to fight men. Solomon has to build the temple.

Why is this so important? Well, I think this is why it's so important as we wrap it up. A couple of reasons. Jesus had a lot to say about those who were grabbing for things ahead of time.

He had a lot to say about those who heard the promises of God but were not too concerned about how they were going to be fulfilled. Hence why so many people missed Jesus.

[29 : 15] So many people just missed Jesus. Are you the Messiah? Are you the one who's come to do this? Are you that? What are they doing? They're trying to do the same thing and work out the details and forget the promise that God has actually made.

Christians are meant to understand like Solomon is meant to understand that I am to do things in God's way whatever Hiram says.

Okay? Hiram wants to change the details. He wants to say that's not the way to do it. I'll send it down to you and you can pick it up your end. Solomon said that's not the way we're going to do it. Why not?

Because that's not the way it ought to be done. Well, how does Solomon know? Is it not just an opinion? Is it not just a matter of difference? Is it not just a case of two builders disagreeing on how things ought to be done?

And you go on to any building site and you'll find the same thing. I think it should be done this way. Well, you can't do that until the mortars set. Okay? I think it should be done that way.

[30 : 16] Is that not what's happening? Is it not just an issue of little details? What's the difference between the wood being sent down and Solomon sending men up? Well, for Solomon, it must be a big deal.

That detail, okay, must be a considerable one in wisdom because he understands the promise of God. He doesn't get lost in the details. Rather, he has his eye on the promise.

And the point here is that Solomon, in wisdom, knows what to pay attention to and knows what to ignore. God knows, Solomon knows that God will fulfill the building of the temple through him.

And Hiram has his own way of thinking of how it should be done. Solomon doesn't agree. He sends men up. Why? Because he's not going to relinquish to others the work of God.

Okay? He's not going to send it out for tender. Well, whoever gives me the best quote will do it that way. No, this is about God's work.

[31 : 26] He doesn't relinquish control over how things ought to be done, especially when it comes to doing the work of God. And so the wisdom here in Solomon's life is knowing what to pay attention to, the Sidonians, the king of Tyre.

He has what I need. And in return, he wants this. And that's fine. That's a good trade-off. But I'm not going to do it his way. Why? Well, there's a couple of reasons, again.

And with this, I'll conclude. Not every contribution by every person has in mind the things of God.

Okay? Let me say it again. Again, not every contribution from every person, even in the church, has in mind the things of God.

And therefore, in wisdom, you need to know what to pay attention to and what to ignore. Why?

Well, because it's the things of God that matter. And not everyone, when undertaking the work of God, has in mind the work of God.

Hiram doesn't. The only thing Hiram's concerned about is what he can have for his own household. He wants wheat. He wants oil. He wants all of this in exchange. His motivation is entirely different than Solomon's motivation.

[32 : 42] What he wants out of the deal does not result in God's glory in a temple being built. It results in what he can have in his own household. Solomon, on the other hand, recognizes that the temple is not for him, but for the Lord.

It isn't about what he can get for himself, but rather how God is using him to fulfill his promise on earth. And for the Christian, that's exactly where we find ourselves when we're having to deal with the world.

Okay? Constant trade-off. I think it should be done this way. I think it should be done that way. Doctor's surgery, healthcare, nurses, schools, universities.

There's a number of things. What is it? It's a trade-off. That's all that it is, is a trade-off. I think it should be done this way. And the Christian church should be saying, okay, we can agree on these, but at this point I'm going to have to ignore you.

Why? Because our motivation is completely different. Okay? We don't have the same motivation in mind. We don't have the same concerns in mind. What you are trying to get out of, what you're trying to get out of, I want something entirely different.

[33 : 52] Why? Because what I want is the glory of God on earth. For Solomon, it's the temple. This is what it looks like. And so Solomon, in complete wisdom, is not being harsh.

He's not being stubborn. He's not even being difficult. He's simply, in wisdom, knowing what to pay attention to and what to ignore. And that's the challenge for every single one of us in our dealings with the world.

It's not that we don't like Hiram. It's not that we're going to be down on Hiram because he's not one of God's people or down on anybody else. But there comes a point, there comes a point in the trade-off when it comes to getting our car fixed or it comes to the health care of a family member or the education of a child.

There comes a point where you're going to go, right, I can go so far with you up to this point. But now I have to ignore you. Why? Because our motivation is entirely different.

What you want out of it and what I want out of it is completely different. It is not the same. So Solomon, in 1 Kings 5, though he's dealing with an unbeliever, knows what to pay attention to and what to ignore in order to do the will of God on earth.

[35 : 06] Amen.