

Sermon Notes, 1 Kings 4, Sunday 1st Feb 2026

When you're young, you look forward to all the things you might achieve. Life stretches ahead and you have ambition. There comes an age where you start to look back. A golden era in the past. A golden era that's no longer here. It might be a golden era in your past. A job you no longer have. A house you no longer live in. A family you no longer have. Health and fitness that is no more. Or it might be a golden era in society. An age when every high street was full of varied shops, when you knew everyone in your street, when you could go out and leave your door unlocked. It's easy to become wistful, and to reminisce.

The book of 1 and 2 Kings tells about 400 years of Israel's story, roughly from 970 BC to 570 BC, starting with the reign of Solomon, ending in their exile in Babylon. So it was written at the end, in exile in Babylon.

This chapter would be an emotional read for them. They'd be looking back, unable to believe they had it this good. And saying, "I can't believe we had all that and lost the lot." The rest of Kings will answer the obvious question, where did things go wrong. Today, put ourselves in their shoes. We're going to relive their mixture of misty-eyed reminisce and deep grief at what they'd lost.

Flaws appear

We'll spend most of our time exploring how this chapter is Israel's golden age. But there's another side, something to make us long for even better.

Solomon is a complicated character. He didn't start good and turn bad. He's a complete mixture. The focus of this chapter is the glory of Solomon. But we need to notice the seeds of what will go wrong later.

4 seeds:

(i) Forced labour. Verses 1-6 give us the cabinet reshuffle. Many are names we already know, love and trust. But why is someone in charge of forced labour. That doesn't sound like a government department you want. Samuel warned against this when they asked for a king. Adoniram will be a key player in chapter 12 when the wheels really come off.

(ii) Taxation. In verses 7-19, Solomon is Mr Mobilisation. He organises a 12 month rota to feed the royal household. The second half of the chapter will show that the whole nation was well fed. This chapter glosses over how this will be paid for. The fact they're feathering Solomon's nest will come back to bite him.

(iii) The wrong regions with the wrong leadership. Look at the 12 regions. They're not the same as the tribal regions. They're named after cities, not tribes. Judah is missing. Eleven tribes, organised in Solomon's own way, will feed the king from Judah. What's more, many of the governors are connected with Solomon in some way. Instead of recognising local leadership, he sends his own mates to supervise. What could possibly go wrong?

(iv) Horses. Verse 26. If you read Deuteronomy 17, these are bad news. Chapter 10 will spell that out. Here it's just mentioned. The seed is sown.

But overall, the message is that under Solomon things were really good.

Let's see the glory of Solomon.

More glorious than Adam

Read verses 29-34.

Adam ate the fruit from a tree he saw was desirable for gaining wisdom. What Adam stole, God gave Solomon. Such wisdom. What did he do with his wisdom?

He ruled. Verse 21. Verse 24. That's a much less common word for "rule", something like "have dominion".

Verse 33a. He knew all about plant life. He knew how to make a garden. Who else do you know who managed a garden? 4 rivers flowed from the Garden of Eden. One of them was the Euphrates.

He knew all about animals too. Verse 33b. 4 categories of animals. Who else do you know named animals? Genesis 1:26 ("had dominion", same word). Not the same 4, but 4 categories of the animal kingdom.

And so Solomon's glory shone. Verse 34.

More glorious than Abraham

God did not bless Solomon out of the blue. Verse 20. This picks up Genesis 22:17. That phrase has appeared a few times since Abraham, but always to describe one of Israel's enemies. Gideon saw that the camels of the Midianite army "could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore" (Judges 7:12).

Now, for the first time, it's used of the people of God. God's people cannot be counted.

How is Solomon going to rule such a vast people wisely? Verse 29. He gets wisdom that cannot be measured.

God promised Abraham's descendants the land (Genesis 15:18). And here we are (verse 21).

God promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through them. Verse 34.

What God is doing for the people through Solomon is what he promised he would do through Abraham.

More glorious than Joseph

The nations flocked to Joseph to be fed. The nations flock to Solomon to be fed, not with food, but to hear his wisdom.

But then they do get fed.

Verses 22-23. 5 tonnes of wheat flour, 10 tonnes of barley flour, 30 cattle, a hundred flock, and other animals too. Per day! No, not all of this food was for Solomon and his family! Verse 27 – all who came to the king's table. We're not told

who this is. Estimates range from 12 to 35 thousand people fed each day from Solomon's table.

More glorious than Joshua

Moses handed over to Joshua. God says this to Joshua: "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. ... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:7-9).

The book of Kings opens with David handing over to Solomon. "Be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go." (1 Kings 2:2-3)

Joshua went on to divide up the land west of the river Jordan. In this chapter, Solomon divides up the land west of the river Euphrates.

Look again at why Solomon doesn't follow the ancient tribal boundaries in verses 8-19. Yes, it sowed the seeds of trouble, but the good news is the land has grown. They have more land than they've ever had, and more than they ever will again.

At the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua tells the people that "not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed."

With Solomon God takes those promises and fulfils them on an even bigger canvas. More glorious than ever before.

More glorious than Solomon

Lastly, Solomon is more glorious than Solomon. I'd better explain!

Look at the summary in verse 20. Those 3 verbs: ate, drink, happy. Usually come together in connection with the temple. Here's one example: Deuteronomy 12:7.

This is what the temple courts are for. They are the place to eat, drink and be happy.

Solomon is famous for two things: his wisdom and his temple. He hasn't built the temple yet. Only he has. The whole land has become a place for eating, drinking and being happy together in the presence of God. The whole land has become the temple forecourt. He's outdone even himself.

Jesus, more glorious than Solomon

Picture the people in Babylon, reading this. "Wow, we had it so good. God was so faithful. All his purposes, all his promises, came true all at once under king Solomon. And we've lost all of it."

How does it make us feel?

To answer that, there is one more person Solomon reminds us of.

Jesus is more glorious than Adam. He has perfect dominion over all the kingdoms of the world. He has perfect wisdom, and the natural world is under his control.

One day, it will be released from its bondage to decay, and the beautiful garden will emerge.

Jesus is more glorious than Abraham. His people are described as a great multitude no-one can count. One day that will be so. The nations stream to him, so that all nations on earth can be blessed through him.

Jesus is more glorious than Joseph. Great crowd flocked to Jesus to hear his wisdom. 5000 Jews on one occasion, 4000 Gentiles on another. And they were fed, a huge quantity of bread and fish. Ultimately, the bread he feeds us with is himself. "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." By his kindness, even we Gentiles get to eat the crumbs that drop from his table. The king's table feeds the world.

Jesus is more glorious than Joshua. His name is the Greek translation of the name Joshua. He doesn't just distribute a parcel of land west of the river Jordan, or even west of the river Euphrates. He says that the meek will inherit the earth. All of it. All authority has been given to him. All nations are called to be his disciples. With Jesus, all God's good promises truly are fulfilled.

And Jesus is more glorious than Solomon. He's wiser than Solomon. His own risen body is the new temple. One day he will return to this earth so that wherever you live it will be a place of peace, security, prosperity, eating, drinking and being truly happy for all eternity.

How do we feel?

So how does all this make us feel?

Two things. Don't look back in pain. Do look forward with hope.

The day will come when Jesus returns. None of us deserve anything good from him on that day. But he died and rose again so that his people can enjoy God's kindness.

There will be a great division when Jesus returns. Those who have known and trusted him will begin the best chapter of their lives, living with him on a perfect world. The golden age of Israel under Solomon will not come close.

Those who have not known Jesus will miss out.

So: Don't look back in pain.

Remember how painful this chapter would have been for them? They had all this, and they lost it. That is nothing compared to how it will feel when Jesus returns. You'd see the wonderful, unspoilt life Jesus has brought to his people, and say "I had all that offered to me, and I didn't take it." The sadness of exile in Babylon will be tiny compared to the grief and regret on that day. Don't miss out. Come to Jesus.

For those of us who know Jesus, look forwards with hope.

Don't look back to your childhood, your student days, the day you had that dream job, the day before you got sick. Look forwards to the great and glorious day,

when all God's good promises will be fulfilled. The day when the second Adam, the better Abraham, the ultimate Joseph, the new Joshua, the fulfilment of Solomon will come.

Verse 20.

"Amen, come Lord Jesus"