

1. Let me start with my lesson title: "The danger of having everything you could ever want". Now there's a title guaranteed to make one ignore this lesson. So what's wrong with having everything one could want? The answer is if we have that, why trust in God? In these two chapters, we will read about the nation of Israel at the height of its power. Solomon has so much material wealth it has the appearance of being irrelevant. As if that's not enough, he has so much fame that leaders of other country travel just to hear his wisdom. As a topper, he also has so much power as a king that surrounding nations trade heavily with Israel. Then there are the surrounding nations that his father David conquered. One has to admit, this is a pretty good deal if one was Solomon. So my question of this lesson, is what's wrong with this picture?
 - a) The point is to show us that neither money, nor power nor fame truly gives one joy in life. If anything it draws us away from God as we have to then spend all of our time managing those other things. I'm not saying have those things are bad unto themselves. My point is if we spend our lives focusing on acquiring those things we end up turning from God and become miserable. That is the great lesson to be learned from Solomon's life.
 - b) I can just see some of you think, "Just give me some fame, power and money. I'll take that rather than living my present life of just trying to survive through the day." Ask yourself why did God go out of his way to warn Solomon of the danger of turning from Him as He did to start this chapter? Stop and consider that God never warned David of the danger of turning from Him. Yet these two chapters start with God giving Solomon that specific warning about his life and the danger of Israel collectively ignoring Him. The danger of having it all means that one is no longer desiring a relationship with God so that He can guide our lives for His glory. That is the great tragedy and lesson of Solomon's life.
2. In these two chapters, we are going to read of fame, fortune and power more than any one of us can every imagine in one's life. In fact, after the warning from God about the danger of turning from Him, we read about how much gold Solomon get to the point where it became meaningless. We will read of a foreign queen traveling by camel for 1,200 miles. That's a three-month journey on the back of camel just to meet Solomon and hear his wisdom. We will read of other countries trading with Israel and in short, Solomon becoming very wealthy and famous by these actions.
 - a) So is the bible saying, we should never try to acquire these things to survive? Of course one needs to survive financially and there is nothing basically wrong with being blessed either financially, by wisdom, or by fame. The point is when we turn from God because we have those things.
 - b) The great lesson of this chapter is about using the natural gifts God has given each of us just to enrich our own lives and not use those gifts or our time or resources for His glory.
 - c) In effect, the warning is about putting ourselves before God. It teaches that having those things in any great manner does not necessarily draw us close to Him or make us a better witness for Him. The nation of Israel was at the height of its power here, and had all the riches, fame and power that any one could ever want. However, what they failed to do is trust in God during this time to make a difference for Him.
 - d) In effect, we're back to the main theme of "Kings": wanting to be like the world around us. The world around us seeks fame, fortune and power. The story of Solomon teaches us if we have those things beyond our ability to comprehend, doesn't make us a better witness for God by having all of those things. We may be more comfortable in our lives if we have some of these things, but it won't make the eternal difference for God by having this. That is the great lesson of this chapter: The realization that God desires we depend upon Him to make a difference for Him and not whatever gifts, power and wealth that we acquire in life. Therefore, one has to see these chapters as the unfolding of a tragic story, despite all the riches and fame we read about. With that said, we're ready to start the story itself.

3. 1st Kings 9, Verse 1: When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, ² the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon.
 - a) If you recall from Chapter 8, Solomon gave a big prayer and speech where he asked God to bless the temple and that He would forgive the Israelites when they sin. If one reads this chapter, at first glance, one would think that God is responding right after Solomon made that prayer. To get the time line, one has to read this carefully:
 - i) The temple was finished after a seven-year building time line. (See Chapter 6:38.)
 - ii) The temple was dedicated right after this temple was done. (Implied - Chapter 8.)
 - iii) Solomon took a total of twenty years to finish these building projects, based on these verses here plus Chapter 9, Verse 10, coming up.
 - iv) My point here is that God did not respond right after Solomon offered all of those countless animals and gave his dedication prayer. This response by God came at the end of the 20 year construction project by Solomon of not only the temple, that was done in the first seven of the 20 years, but after Solomon finished building his own house and a house for the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh who he took as his wife. Then God spoke to Solomon.
 - b) OK, now that I've beaten the "when" issue over all our heads. What is the "why" here? What did God say to Solomon and why should we care about this?
 - i) First it teaches us a little about direct messages from God. Solomon had at least a twenty-year gap between getting direct revelation from God about what He wants Solomon to do with his life. For those of us who expect miracles daily from Him as to what to do next, remember that Solomon waited decades between messages from Him. But I thought God wants a relationship with us and He desires to have a close and personal relationship with us daily? Yes He does and that is why we should daily pray to Him and daily read His word and regularly get together with other Christians in order to have that type of relationship He desires of us.
 - ii) My point is simply that we should not depend upon "special" messages from Him daily. It's as if God is saying to us, "I gave you a brain, now go use it. I gave you a set of instructions to follow, I gave you special gifts to be used to make a difference for Me. I don't have to daily give each of you any more special messages as that is enough right there to guide you (us)."
 - a) That thought does not mean we ignore God or stop praying to Him. It just means that we learn to trust Him without depending upon or hoping for some sort of special message or sign directly from Him.
 - c) Back to the text, it mentions that this is the second time God gave a special message to Solomon. What was the first time? Without going into a lot of details from the first few chapters of 1st Kings, it was when God told Solomon that he had the gift of wisdom. It was the confirmation of what was Solomon's special gift that he had.
 - i) Let me pause really quick to remind ourselves about our own spiritual gifts. First if you are a Christian, know that you have some sort of special gift(s) or talents. If you don't know what it is, ask your friends what is it you are especially good at or what is your particular talent. Another test is simply to ask if you didn't have to go earn a living, what would you want to do all day? Those types of clues help us to learn what are our spiritual gifts. I'll come back to the purpose of those spiritual gifts a little later in this lesson. First, some final thoughts on these verses:
 - ii) Why did God pick this moment to speak to Solomon? The issue is that he finished all of the building projects he intended to build. There are times in our lives where we think, "OK God, I'm done with that. What's next?" One reason God gave him a revelation here is simply because Solomon may not have known what to do next. However, God's words to Solomon are mostly about his behavior. Let's read on:

4. Verse 3: The LORD said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.
 - a) Remember that this response by God did not come right after the dedication ceremony of the previous chapter. It is kind of like God saying, "Hey Solomon, remember that prayer of dedication you made years ago? I still remember that like it was yesterday." With that said, let me talk a little about what else God is implying by this opening statement.
 - b) God is not saying the building Solomon had built will stand forever. What God is saying is that God can't un-love what He loves. He called Israel as a nation of out of Egypt and He desires a relationship with those He calls. Therefore, He is always concerned about those people He has called (think you and me) to be obedient to Him and that He be the central focus of our lives.
 - c) Let me try this one more way and I'll move on. It always amazed me to consider that God created the universe in all of its vastness but then say, this little piece of land that we call Israel is mine (God's). Just as God desires that we focus upon Him so He desires a place that is the central focus of that worship. Of course we can worship Him anywhere as God is everywhere. That goes without saying. The point here is that God desires we focus as a collective entity to worship Him. In this case God said He wants the Israelites to gather as an entity here, towards the temple in Jerusalem so that they collectively seek Him so that they can focus on Him and trust Him (and us) to guide their lives.
 - d) Meanwhile, while you and I gather at our local churches to worship Him, what God has to say here to Solomon applies to all of us. Therefore, it is time to read on.
5. Verse 4: "As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws,⁵ I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'
 - a) The most important word to learn in these two verses is the word "if". If you are the type of person who likes to underline in your bible, that single word "if" is key here. With that said, let me know give some details.
 - i) The related idea to notice here is the concept that God's promises to the nation of Israel are conditional. John's loose translation: Hey Solomon, if you continue to obey Me, then you and your descendants will rule over Israel forever.
 - ii) But wasn't the promise to David about a descendant of His ruling unconditional? Yes it was and it is very important to understand the difference. The unconditional promise is that a descendant of David will rule forever. That is Jesus in the sense that He rules over billions of people who call Him the Lord of their lives. There is also coming a day when He will return to rule from David's throne as that promise was made to Mary (Luke 1:32). Angels also said that Jesus would return to earth the same way He left (Acts 1:1). That's the unconditional promise.
 - iii) Here is the conditional promise: God expects obedience. David's descendants will be kings over the kingdom of Israel as long as they are obedient to His laws. The reason that kingdom eventually failed was due to their disobedience to God.
 - b) Here is where this effects you and me. If we are trusting Jesus as the complete payment for our sins, we can't lose our salvation no matter how hard we try. However, we like the Israelites can lose our "witness" for Him if we fail to be obedient to what He has called us to do: Be a witness for Him. This is why I brought up the issue of our spiritual gifts a bit ago. God wants us to use those gifts to make a difference for Him in this world. If we do fail to use those gifts, God can and does take away our witness for Him. Does that mean He can or will kill us on the spot? Not likely, but I have seen people who have stopped trusting in God no longer be witnesses for Him and their lives go downhill from there.
 - c) Meanwhile God is getting warmed up on lecturing Solomon on how to live his life.

6. Verse 6: "But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them,⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.⁸ And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'⁹ People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them--that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.' "
- a) To understand what God is saying here, we need to recall a little from the last chapter and Solomon's prayer before God. Solomon said in effect back then, when this disaster occurs or that disaster occurs because we failed to trust in God, let us ask forgiveness for our sins and turn back to Him. In effect, God is giving His commentary to that prayer request in these four verses.
 - b) To sum up God's response in a single thought, "Hey disobedience to Me is costly and it will be painful. Not only will you or your descendants not be kings, but I will literally destroy this kingdom based on a lack of obedience".
 - c) Think about these verses this way: It would be easy for the Israelites to think, "Hey God brought us as a nation out of Egypt and God made an unconditional promise that one day a descendant of David would rule forever. So no matter how badly we mess up, God will never take away the land of Israel from us, because He needs that Messiah, whoever He is to rule from this place."
 - i) God is responding to that thought in effect with "No way, you've got it wrong. If you are disobedient to Me I can and will kick You out of this land and destroy this temple that you Solomon are so proud that you made."
 - ii) If you think about it, God had a dilemma. He can't tolerate disobedience but at the same time He made an unconditional promise of a descendant of David would be a king forever. That is why the nation of Israel can't be kicked out permanently. They can be kicked out temporarily as they were back then, but at the same time in order for God to keep His word, there has to be another day where they'll be back in the land as a single nation as they are today.
 - d) I want you to consider these verses another way before I move on. Why did God give this particular speech to Solomon now? After all, God never told David about the importance of being obedient. I suspect that God is encouraging Solomon's behavior due to that flaw, and that's why this speech was given to Solomon and not to David.
 - i) Let me put it this way: David messed up all the time, but always trusted in God to guide His life. It appears Solomon trusted in the gifts God gave him and not God Himself. That is why Solomon said to God in the last chapter, look at this temple that I (key bad word) have made for You. (Chapter 8:13).
 - ii) That leads me back to my title of the danger of having everything you could want. Solomon as we'll read in these two chapters had all of the money, power and fame that anyone could ever imagine. Instead of trusting God with all of those things he used them simply to grow richer and more famous. The lesson for you and me as we read these verses is not to think about say, growing rich. It is to realize that God is in charge of our lives, He desires we use our lives to make a difference for Him and we use whatever spiritual gifts we have to make that difference.
 - iii) In the meantime, God is warning Solomon here about the danger of turning from Him. That is why he gets this particular message from God at this point in his life.
 - e) The lesson for us in this verses is that whatever blessings we have from God can be taken from us if we fail to be a good witness for Him. It can mean our lives can come to a quick end, but what is worse is having to live with the consequences of turning from Him.

7. Verse 10: At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings--the temple of the LORD and the royal palace-- ¹¹ King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and pine and gold he wanted. ¹² But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. ¹³ "What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?" he asked. And he called them the Land of Cabul, a name they have to this day. ¹⁴ Now Hiram had sent to the king 120 talents of gold.
- a) At this point in the story, God's message to Solomon is finished and he has to go back to the business of being the king. A reason God's message to Solomon is recorded here is to compare and contrast how Solomon actually acted with God's warnings to him.
 - b) With that said, the first order of business for Solomon to deal with after God spoke to him was about having to settle debts with the neighboring king. The reason this text is here is we're going to start to see a pattern of Solomon's subtle but definite disobedience to God's laws by the way Solomon acted in these chapters. With that said, here are the details:
 - i) Solomon made a deal with the king of Tyre (think Lebanon today) that Tyre will give 120 talents of gold in exchange for land in Israel. We don't know if Solomon needed the money to pay construction debts, but for whatever reason a deal was struck with a specific amount of hard currency in exchange Solomon giving some towns in Israel away to this foreign king.
 - ii) As to how much is a talent of gold I'll get to that a little later. The biblical word translated "talent" refers to a year's worth of income to the average person. We're going to read about a lot more gold here, so I'll save that discussion for later.
 - c) What I want to focus upon here is why did Solomon give up land in Israel for this gold?
 - i) Maybe at this point Solomon needed to pay the king of Tyre, and Solomon didn't have any other assets to give him. What is interesting is that Hiram, the king of Tyre called the towns "worthless" which is rough translation of the word Cabul, as stated in Verse 13. What the text does say is that Hiram did send Solomon 120 talents of gold even though he didn't think much of his end of the business deal.
 - ii) A pattern we are going to see with Solomon is that he grows rich by trading and using whatever assets he controlled. The key issue we'll debate as we go through this chapter is whether or not any of this was God's will for Solomon. What the text does say is that Hiram gave Solomon in effect all the wood and gold that he wanted and all that Hiram got in exchange was these "worthless" towns. Some have suggested that Solomon's shrewdness in this business deal helped Solomon to grow richer. While that may or may not be true, the point is he did give away in effect what belonged to God, part of the land of Israel and that's the issue.
 - d) OK John, too bad for Solomon. How does this affect me? It's about seeing life from God's perspective. What may seem like a good business deal or a good proposition may or may not be His will for our lives. That is what should be considered as we read this section.
 - i) Meanwhile, it's time to get back to Solomon.
8. Verse 15: Here is the account of the forced labor King Solomon conscripted to build the LORD's temple, his own palace, the supporting terraces, the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazer, Megiddo and Gezer. ¹⁶ (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. ¹⁷And Solomon rebuilt Gezer.) He built up Lower Beth Horon, ¹⁸ Baalath, and Tadmor in the desert, within his land, ¹⁹ as well as all his store cities and the towns for his chariots and for his horses--whatever he desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon and throughout all the territory he ruled.
- a) The bottom line here is we read of Solomon growing rich through trade and through the wisdom that God gave him. Verse 15 summarizes all of the building projects that he did oversee during the last 20 years that he reigned as king.

- b) In Verse 16, we get a strange comment about the king of Egypt (called Pharaoh). To sum it up, he lead his army to capture a city in Israel ruled by non-Israelites and burned it to the ground and killed the inhabitants. Then Pharaoh gave that town in effect to Solomon as a wedding gift for his daughter. I would say that requires an explanation. Here goes:
 - i) God desired hundreds of years earlier that the Israelites kill the Canaanites who lived in Israel. God did not ordain the Israelites to kill all its enemies just this one group who lived in Israel. Why? Think of it as a mercy killing. Their practices of child sacrifices and sexual deviancy had grown so bad, in effect it was the most merciful thing God could do for those people. Since some of that nation was still around at the time of Solomon, in effect this killing by Pharaoh was God ordained.
 - ii) Solomon then rebuilt the town that Pharaoh destroyed and it then was filled with a Jewish population. While all of this seems cruel to us, one has to understand the history of the Israelites dealing with the Canaanites and God's instructions about the destruction of that group. In a way it is showing in effect that God's will, gets done even if the Israelites don't do what it that God desires that do.
 - c) Meanwhile, these verses do focus on the growth and power of the nation of Israel under Solomon's rule. It doesn't necessarily show Solomon's obedience to God, but it does show that Solomon used his gift of wisdom to grow that kingdom in power. So isn't this a good thing for the Israelites, to live in peace with a powerful neighbor like the Egyptians and at the same time Solomon successfully trades with the king of Tyre so that he gives Solomon lots of gold in exchange for worthless land? One has to admit, all of this sounds pleasant if one is an Israelite at that time. The issue is not money, the issue is doing God's will.
 - i) My point is one can grow rich by financially doing the right thing at the right time, however, it may or may not be God's will for our lives. The biggest question one has to ask about one's life is essentially, "Here are the gifts and talents that God has given me. How can I use them to make a difference for Him in this world?" That is the question we'll pose about Solomon as we go through this lesson. In the meantime, we need to see what else he does in his relationship with other people.
9. Verse 20: All the people left from the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (these peoples were not Israelites), ²¹ that is, their descendants remaining in the land, whom the Israelites could not exterminate--these Solomon conscripted for his slave labor force, as it is to this day. ²² But Solomon did not make slaves of any of the Israelites; they were his fighting men, his government officials, his officers, his captains, and the commanders of his chariots and charioteers. ²³ They were also the chief officials in charge of Solomon's projects--550 officials supervising the men who did the work.
- a) Remember I said it was God's will for the Israelites to kill the existing nations that lived in the land of Israel as a mercy killing? Well, we have those people listed in Verse 20 with a key point being that they are still alive. Here we read of compromise with God's will: Solomon didn't have them killed but forced into slave labor. Why? I'm sure Solomon was thinking, "Hey why should I kill them when I can make them into slave labor? After all, it is not their fault that their ancestors were bad people." You know you are in trouble with God the moment you start thinking compromise.
 - b) First, let me get back to why God wanted these groups dead. The short version is they as nations practiced probably to that day things that were so disgusting, God is saying to the Israelites, I need you to perform a mercy killing on them. For starters, they were guilty of offering their children to their gods. Archeologists have found evidence of other horrible things and lets just say it was more merciful to kill them then to let them keep practicing what they were practicing. Here we see more evidence of why God gave a big warning to Solomon in the speech that opened this chapter. Solomon in all of his success and riches was compromising with what God desired he as the king and all the Israelites do, which in short is to be obedient to what He desires of our lives.

- c) Finally the verses say that Solomon had 550 Israelites supervising the slave labor who did all of the real work. OK, why is that there and why should I care?
 - i) Think of these 550 who watched over the Canaanite slave labor force. It means the Israelites witnessed how they lived their lives and didn't do as God commanded. It was more profitable to have these groups be slave labor. The Israelites in effect forget they were slaves themselves once and did what God forbade them to do.
 - ii) Remember the big theme of "1st and 2nd Kings": The danger of wanting to live like the world around us. That is what the Israelites are starting to do here.
 - iii) Meanwhile, it is time to get back to the story of Solomon's life.
- 10. Verse 24: After Pharaoh's daughter had come up from the City of David to the palace Solomon had built for her, he constructed the supporting terraces.
 - a) John's very loose translation: Solomon had this group of slave labors build more things in Jerusalem. Specifically they built supporting terraces (think balconies) for the house that Solomon built for his wife.
 - b) And this is in the bible because? First of all, Solomon should not have married a foreign queen. Next, Solomon should not have made slave labor of the Canaanites. OK, John, we get the idea Solomon is messing up. Why should we care? Again, think in terms of living like the world around us. The world around the Israelites was full of idolatry and even allowed slavery and bad things to happen. Here we see Solomon modeling that behavior.
 - c) OK John, we don't have slaves. The issue is to consider are we living like nonbelievers or are we living as God desires we live? On that note of guilt, onto Verse 25.
- 11. Verse 25: Three times a year Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had built for the LORD, burning incense before the LORD along with them, and so fulfilled the temple obligations.
 - a) There are three sets of holidays where Jewish people are suppose to, as we might say in our modern vocabulary, "go to church". Solomon used those occasions to make sacrifices. I'm sure there were a large number of animals sacrificed as of to show off his riches. The problem is that the priests and not the king were supposed to make those sacrifices. Once again we are starting to see subtle signs of Solomon turning against God's desire for His life. That is why God warned him in the beginning of this chapter.
 - b) One more quick example and we'll finish this chapter.
- 12. Verse 26: King Solomon also built ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath in Edom, on the shore of the Red Sea.²⁷ And Hiram sent his men--sailors who knew the sea--to serve in the fleet with Solomon's men.²⁸ They sailed to Ophir and brought back 420 talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.
 - a) If you study the history of Israel, they have never been big sea going people. Other than during Solomon's reign (and their modern navy) Israel was not known for having a large navy and trading with other nations by ships. The bible has very little to say about the Israelites and the fact they have a large piece of coastland on the Mediterranean Sea.
 - b) The simple point here is that Solomon grew rich by trading with our countries. With the help of his buddy King Hiram of Tyre, Israel sent its merchandise elsewhere to trade.
 - c) The one thing historically to get out of this section is to see how much Solomon grew in his reputation as Israel grew rich in trading with others. Remember that Tyre was a city historically known for growing rich by trade. At this moment in history, Tyre is buddies with Israel so I suspect both of those countries benefited from this business venture.
 - d) This leads me back to my lesson title, "What's wrong with having everything you could ever want". Think of life this way: We can use one's time to grow rich or we can use our time to make a difference for God. Yes wealth can mean one has a bigger influence over others. I'll rephrase that question: What if one only cared about managing wealth once one has it? How is one using one's time to make a difference for God if one only cares about growing one's wealth?

- e) All of this reminds me of a conversation I had with my father many years ago on this topic. He wondered why I gave part of my income to my church and I was spending so much time teaching the bible. His advice to me was in effect, "Work on building up your business first and then get involved with charity". I don't remember what I said to him after that, but my response today would be, what if I don't live long enough to only give after say, I grow rich whenever that occurs? My point is one needs to live a life to make a difference for God now assuming there is no tomorrow. If He chooses to financially bless our lives over and above that, praise God use that blessing and may we use it to further His kingdom.
 - f) Let me give a few quick technical notes and then I'll move on to Chapter 10. The text says the ships were built on the coastline of the Red Sea as opposed to the Mediterranean. Why is that? I suppose because the water was calmer for construction. The strange part about that aspect is the Red Sea has no outlet. The ships then had to be manually transported by across the country in order to be used. This simply shows the hard work under the reign of Solomon as ships were somehow carried across that country.
 - i) The other bit of trivia is "where is Opir?" This is an untranslated word. Scholars suspect it is somewhere in Africa where gold mines were located.
 - ii) The main point to get here is that Solomon was growing both rich and famous via his trading efforts. The effect of his fame tie well to the first part of Chapter 10.
13. Chapter 10, Verse 1: When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. ² Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan--with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones--she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. ³ Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. ⁴ When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, ⁵ the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.
- a) To begin, who and where is the "queen of Sheba"? Most scholars suspect this is modern Yemen while others argue Ethiopia. Imagine traveling 1,200 miles on camel. It would be a long journey especially if one is carrying a lot of gold, jewelry and soldiers to protect that caravan. If nothing else, this text shows us that the fame of Solomon spread to the point where leaders of other countries were interested in traveling to Israel, not to hear about God but to check out Solomon himself.
 - i) For those of you interested in having fame, this is it. Imagine being so famous that people are willing to travel this far in an uncomfortable way, bearing lots of gifts just to be close to this famous person.
 - ii) It is an argument that fortune and fame could make us a good witness for God just because people want to see us. However, for a king like Solomon who was mainly interested in wealth at this time in his life, that fame was wasted as a witness.
 - b) Let me explain these verses another way: Sometimes what the text doesn't say matters as much as what the text actually says. The text does not say this queen was impressed by Solomon's devotion to God. It doesn't say he taught her about God. Instead it says how impressed she was by all of the king's stuff and how good Solomon was at organizing his life. Remember that this woman was a queen herself, so she was accustomed to royalty.
 - i) I think what impressed her was the wisdom that God had given Solomon and how he used that wisdom to govern.
 - ii) But isn't that being a good witness to God? By using one's spiritual gifts to help others? Didn't Solomon do well here? Consider if she was impressed by how God blessed this country or was she just impressed by Solomon's wisdom. I believe it was only the latter. She probably thought, "This guy has a gift for wisdom and he even honors the local god." I'd guess that worshipping God didn't spread by her.

- iii) Let me compare and contrast this story with a New Testament story in the book of Acts when a non-king disciple named Philip helped an Ethiopian official who was returning home from Israel learn more about God. Phillip lead this official to Jesus by explaining one of the most famous Old Testament passages about Jesus (Isaiah Chapter 53) more clearly. (This is all from Acts, Chapter 8, Verses 26-40.)
 - iv) My point of comparing these two stories is to show Solomon and all of his riches and fame in my opinion was less of a witness for God than an average person who was simply willing to be used by God to make a difference for Him. Solomon had his fame spread. Phillip had God be spread. Now let me make all of us fell guilty and consider the most valuable asset we own, our time and how we should use it to make a difference for what matters eternally.
 - v) With that said, it was not all bad for Solomon. He did impress her and we'll read some positive things she said in the next few verses.
- 14. Verse 6: She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. ⁷ But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. ⁸ How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! ⁹ 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."
 - a) John's loose translation of Queen Sheba's thoughts: "It was worth the trip. It was worth having a sore behind from all of those months traveling on the back of a camel. I wanted to see the fame and fortune of Solomon and I'm impressed. How impressive is the God who rules over this land who has blessed you this way."
 - b) Notice the most holy name of God is used twice in Verse 9. Doesn't that mean that Sheba did learn about God and how He blesses people? Yes and no. I suspect she thought that if I worship this local deity, I too can have fame and wisdom like Solomon. To quote one of my favorite sayings on this topic, "God did not die to increase our golf score". In other words, we don't serve God in order to grow rich or be famous. We serve Him because He has died for our sins and we are saved because of that fact. We serve God out of gratitude for our lives, not to get stuff or fame as this queen was probably thinking here.
 - c) To explain this message another way, it is easy to be impressed by wealth and fame when it is visible and right in front of us. Serving God out of gratitude only for what He's done for us requires some thought and trust in a God we can't see. That's why Phillips message to the Ethiopian official was in my opinion more impressive that Sheba and Solomon.
 - d) This leads us to Verse 10, the queens' parting gift to Solomon.
- 15. Verse 10: And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.
 - a) More of my loose translation: "Solomon you are now going to be even richer based on my visit here. Here's lots of gold, lot of diamonds and other jewels and spices." So why is the emphasis so much on the spices than the gold and jewelry? I suspect that the amount of gold was getting so big in Solomon's treasury, it was getting to where it was a non-issue. However having new spices to preserve and flavor one's food was something new.
 - b) Let's pause for a moment and take in the big picture. Solomon was obviously getting rich from trade. He was now getting famous from his visits. The text implies that after he had all of these things, it continued to multiply upon itself. That's the issue with money and fame. There is never enough. It becomes the issue as opposed to living one's life to make a difference for God with one's life. But wasn't Solomon a good witness in that Sheba did invoke God's name and use it in a positive sense? Yes and no. She was impressed but I suspect it was only in terms of how God can bless His people. Again it's the danger of thinking what God can do for us as opposed to us living to make a difference for Him.

16. Verse 11: (Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almugwood and precious stones.¹² The king used the almugwood to make supports for the temple of the LORD and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almugwood has never been imported or seen since that day.)
- a) Meanwhile we get a break from the how impressive you are Solomon story to say that the ships that the king of Tyre built for Solomon for trading was making Solomon even richer by bringing gold, almugwood and more precious stones which is diamonds and other types of stones.
 - b) Let me now save you a quick trip, as I googled "almugwood". This is another word that was not translated. The answer is it depends upon where one believes "Ophir" is. Some argue Ophir means India and it is a tree and wood that is from that region. Others argue this wood came from Syria and it is a juniper tree.
 - i) Whatever it was, it was new to Israel and it was good wood. Solomon used this material for a bunch of uses as listed in Verse 12.
 - c) The big picture idea is again, it shows Solomon growing richer by trading and importing things to help out the Israelites including a type of wood not natural to that area. So why should I care about all of this? Remember the big theme of the book of "Kings": It's about the danger of trying to live like the world (think nonbelievers) around us. The problem of having it all, is the "all" becomes the focus of our lives and not using the most valuable we own, our time to make a difference for God. That the danger of the "all" of this section.
 - d) Meanwhile, we have a final reference to Queen Sheba as she is about to return home:
17. Verse 13: King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all 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.
- a) I suspect Sheba said something like "Solomon it is time to mount the camels again and start the long journey back home. I'm no longer sore from getting here and I've got lots of stuff and stories to tell when I get back home." There's a Jewish legend that she had a son by Solomon during that time, but there's no proof to support that story, so I'll let it die at that. I suspect she left thinking, if I pray to this God, maybe I can have some wisdom too, or at least some riches like Solomon. Since I've beaten that negative point to death, I won't go down that road again. Besides I have something more fun to bring up next.
18. Verse 14: The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents,¹⁵ not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land.
- a) People who know almost nothing about the bible do know that the number associated with the antichrist is "666". Here we read that the amount of gold given to Solomon each year was 666 talents. So does this mean that Solomon is the antichrist? No. However, as it is the only other bible reference to 666, it's worth a quick discussion to understand why.
 - b) First let me explain what that number means. Think how God rested on the seventh day of creation. That means the number "7" is associated with God. The number six is in the bible associated with people as people were created on the sixth day. Think of seeing the number 7 three times in a row as emphasizing God in His perfection. Think if seeing the number 6 three times in a row as seeing "man" being perfected, not in the good sense, but in terms of man being exalted outside of God. That's why the antichrist is associated with that number. Whatever else that number "666" means in the future, I truly don't know or care and I'll let others speculate how that number is tied to the antichrist when he comes.
 - c) It occurred to me I've never explained how much gold is in a talent. It varies, but a rough rule of thumb is about 75 pounds of gold is one talent. Since I'm using Google a lot for this lesson, I checked today's price of gold and it is about \$1,300 per ounce. Therefore, if you want to know how much is 666 talents of gold, doing the math, that comes out to a figure of \$643,950,000, or about \$644 million dollars a year. That is a lot of annual wealth.

- d) OK, so Solomon was a billionaire. We have other billionaires today as well. Here we get another example of showing Israel at the peak of its power and how far it will fall. In fact much of the rest of the chapter gives an idea of how "worthless" gold will become because there was so much of it now in Israel. With that said, let's read on.
19. Verse 16: King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred bekas of gold went into each shield.¹⁷ He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.
- a) You may recall from a few chapters back that one of the buildings that Solomon did make was called the "Palace of the Forest of Lebanon". This building had that name as it was mainly constructed with cedar wood from Lebanon (think of Hiram, the king of Tyre as being in control of that area). The point here is that building became a place to store all of the defensive weapons that Solomon made.
- b) I'm not going to get into another big lecture here about the value of the shields, but let's just say those shields were now expensive. From what I studied, gold is not even the best metal to use for shields and it ended up being more decorative than useful. Know that in a relatively short time after the death of Solomon, these shields will be gone as we'll read how money disappears as fast as it came in. No need to say more about that here.
- c) What I do need to do is finish describing Solomon's wealth in the rest of this chapter. The consequences of Solomon's lifestyle is coming up later in this chapter and the next one.
20. Verse 18: Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold.¹⁹ The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them.²⁰ Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom.²¹ All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and 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 days.²² The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons.
- a) I believe it was an old "Twilight Zone" episode where someone wanted to take a bar of gold with him to heaven. When he got there someone said to him, "Why would someone want to bring common paving up here?" My point is what we consider valuable can get to a point where it is meaningless. Here Solomon's wealth grew to where it is getting very excessive. Solomon's throne chair was made of ivory covered in gold. It appears that all that is around him was now gold oriented. I can just see Solomon trying to justify all of this by saying things like, "My 12 gold lion statues represent the 12 tribes I oversee."
- b) The main thing to get out of all of this was Solomon was rich beyond comprehension. What God wants us to comprehend is the consequences of having all of that riches and fame and how it does more harm than good as focusing on it turns us away from Him
- c) This whole study reminds me of the biblical proverb that says in effect, "Don't make me so poor that I have to beg for a living and don't make me so rich that I ignore God." (That is based on Proverbs 30:9, which Solomon himself probably wrote.)
- d) Meanwhile, back to Solomon's riches. The text implies that gold and silver got to a point where it didn't even have much value any more. The trading ships that Solomon oversaw brought in more and more every year. There appeared to be no end to it all.
- e) The end of Verse 22 has a strange reference to apes and baboons. Some translations say peacocks instead of baboons. It can be translated either way. That is a sign of boredom. When one no longer cares about money, one starts to be interested in entertainment. That is why animals were also imported for the amusement of Solomon and the Israelites.
- f) The point here is Solomon and the Israelites had everything they could ever want. They also had all the fame he could ever want and all the power they could ever want. What did all of that do? It turned them away from God and that is the tragedy of this story. That's why Solomon wrote that proverb that condemned excessive riches.

21. Verse 23: King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.
²⁴The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.
²⁵Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift--articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.
- a) For those who seek fame, one can't top Solomon for all that he had. People both great and small sought to hear him speak and bought him gifts in exchange for a visit. Like I said in the beginning of the lesson, on the surface this seems wonderful. Who would not want to have unlimited riches, power and fame? Think of what one can do with all of that stuff? The issue is not having it, the issue is what does one do with it? Do we read in the bible of the spread of the worship of God based on all that fame? Do we read of other nations that covert to Judaism based on this? No. My point is neither fame, nor money nor power do make a difference for God if we don't dedicate what we have to Him.
 - b) As I implied earlier, Solomon's problem isn't that he didn't believe God existed. What he did was rely upon the gifts that God unconditionally gave him and not the one (God) who gave him those gifts in the first place. This leads back to you and me. God does give each of us gifts unconditionally. The issue is do those gifts draw us closer to Him, or do we use those gifts for our own fame, power and riches? That was Solomon's fault in a nutshell.
 - c) OK John, none of us have all of those things that Solomon had. Why should we care? The issue is not how much stuff, fame or power one has. The issue is what are we doing with the time God has given us. The most valuable thing we own is our time, and how we use it can make a difference for Him. That is why God gives us the gifts we have. What if we say we are insignificant? My response is if God can use me, He can use anyone. It starts with being submissive to His will for our lives and letting Him lead us accordingly.
 - d) In the meantime, it is time to finish our story about Solomon for today.
22. Verse 26: Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. ²⁷ The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. ²⁸ Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue--the royal merchants purchased them from Kue. ²⁹ They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.
- a) The short version here is that a way Solomon grew rich was by importing and exporting. He saw that some people needed horses and others needed chariots so he bought those things in order to sell them to other groups.
 - b) At this point I need to quote an Old Testament law that Solomon should have been aware of: "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." (Deuteronomy 17:16-17)"
 - i) These verses, that were written hundreds of years before Solomon, warned the Israelites when they have a king rule over them, that king shall not multiply silver, gold, horses or wives for himself. By the way the next verse in Deuteronomy warn that a king shall write a copy of those laws for himself. Guess how many of these laws Solomon violated at this specific this time of his life? How about all of them!
 - ii) Part of me can just see Solomon justifying say acquiring the horses and chariots by saying "they were for trading purposes, I didn't keep them, or saying, look how I have influenced the world through my riches and power."
 - iii) I can't tell you how many people I've met in my life who make statements with the idea that once I get rich or famous, then I'll do this or that for God. They usually never get to that point or when they do, never make that difference for Him.
 - iv) That's the problem with what Solomon accomplished the danger each of us face.

23. OK, we made it through two chapters that on the surface seem wonderful as we read of all that Solomon accomplished, acquired, and showed off. What we don't see is Solomon trusting in God to guide his life in order to make a difference for Him in this world. Instead he trusts in the gifts that God has given him in order to do things that God forbids the Israelite kings to do.
- a) The lesson for you and I is not about the evils of money, power and fame. The danger is to not trust in God to guide our lives and not use them to make a difference for Him in the world. It is to waste the most valuable asset we own, our time for what doesn't eternally matter. With that statement out of my system, time for my closing prayer.
24. Father, as we study the life of Solomon help us to learn that the accumulation of wealth, power and fame don't make an eternal difference for You. Help us to use the most valuable asset we own, our time, to make a difference for Your Kingdom. Help us to work as a group so that our time is used as You desire. Guide our lives as our king so that we may live as You desire that we live. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.