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## September 13th: 1 Kings 5 & Hebrews 4:1-13

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Solomon and Hiram of Tyre. "Today, if you hear his voice..."

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

1 Kings chapter 5. Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon when he heard that they had anointed him king in the place of his father. For Hiram always loved David. And Solomon sent word to Hiram, You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God, because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet.

But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor misfortune. And so I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to David my father.

Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name. Now therefore command that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me, and my servants will join your servants. And I will pay you for your servants such wages as you set.

For you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians. As soon as Hiram heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly and said, Blessed be the Lord this day, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people. And Hiram sent to Solomon saying, I have heard the message that you have sent to me.

I am ready to do all you desire in the matter of cedar and cypress timber. My servants shall bring it down to the sea from Lebanon, and I will make it into rafts to go by sea to the place you direct. And I will have them broken up there, and you shall receive it.

And you shall meet my wishes by providing food for my household. So Hiram supplied Solomon with all the timber of cedar and cypress that he desired. While Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand cores of wheat as food for his household, and twenty thousand cores of beaten oil.

Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year. And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. And there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty.

King Solomon drafted forced labour out of all Israel, and the draft numbered thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts. They would be a month in Lebanon, and two months at home.

Adoniram was in charge of the draft. Solomon also had seventy thousand burden bearers, and eighty thousand stone cutters in the hill country, besides Solomon's three thousand three hundred chief officers who were over the work, who had charge of the people who carried on the work. At the king's command they quarried out great costly stones, in order to lay the foundations of the house with dress stones.

So Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders and the men of Gebel did the cutting, and prepared the timber and the stone to build the house. In 1 Kings chapter 4 verses 24 to 25, we were told of Solomon's power over the surrounding region. Solomon doesn't just rule effectively over the entire territory of Israel, he also secures the peace and stability of the wider region.

For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates, from Tifsa to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him. And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine, and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.

The whole of the region between the great northern powers and the great southern power of Egypt, a region that was generally unsettled and violent, now knows rest and security. It's achieved through Solomon's might and wisdom. Now in chapter 5 we read of Solomon's relations with one of his most important vassals, Hiram of Tyre.

We can have a very negative view about the military dominance of kingdoms and empires, but scripture's view about the dominance of empires and kingdoms is rather more ambivalent and complicated. In large part this is because it recognises the relationship between strong central sovereignty and the way that that protects realms from the violent contestation of sovereignty that can happen otherwise. Power vacuums are incredibly dangerous things, as many parties will try to fill them, and if there is no single party that can effectively do so and establish a truly effective dominance, violence can be interminable.

A dominant king in Israel discourages the violence of rebels and grants peace to the entire region under his protection. David's weakness towards the end of his reign had invited all sorts of conflict both internally and externally, but Solomon's power and dominance spreads peace beyond Israel's borders. Israel's vision was not imperial, although you might see some imperial elements to the way that Solomon becomes a king of kings in this chapter, acting as a suzerain to other vassal kingdoms.

Israel has clearly defined borders for its territorial ambitions. It is not acquisitive or predatory like many of the great empires. However, its dominance of the region is presented as an exceedingly positive thing.

Israel enjoys good relations with the surrounding kingdoms like Tyre, and rather than suppressing them, it secures their peace in exchange for tribute. In such a peaceful context, everyone can prosper. People dwell under their own vine or fig tree, people have their own capital and security, and they can build their own lives within the king's peace.

When the land is secure, you can settle down, you can make plans for the future, you can raise a family, build towns, work the land. Nations can extend their trade routes, grand construction projects and public works can be undertaken, people can travel large distances in safety, a national culture and identity can develop with a growing realm of shared national life and spectacle. Neighbouring and even distant peoples can learn from each other, cultures can thrive.

Without the dominance of Solomon as a king over the entire region, the cultural heights that Israel achieved during this period would simply not have been possible. Solomon's reign was far from perfect, and the problems become more apparent later on. However, if one imagines the experience of an Israelite family during this period, one should get a sense of how remarkable Solomon's golden age must have felt for those who lived through it.

In recent memory, the kingdom had experienced a number of violent rebellions and there were wars on various sides. Less than 50 years earlier, vast swathes of the land were controlled by the Philistines and others. The citadel of the chief city of the land had only been captured a few decades previously.

The nation had suffered catastrophic defeats at the battles of Aphek and Gilboa. They had lived through the reign of a tyrant who had killed all of the priests. And before that, the situation had been even worse, with Israel under the thumb of various peoples around them, fighting for their very survival.

But now, finally, there is peace on every side. They know security and prosperity. Riches and resources are flowing into the land from all sides.

They are eating things that they had never tasted before. The life of their towns is thriving, and other people are coming to learn from them and to trade with them. An immense palace and a temple are being built in their capital.

They have a wise and a just king who is admired by people all around. One can imagine that it would have felt little short of miraculous, and the sense of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises would have been very pronounced. This chapter may seem unimportant to the modern reader, but it gives a window into the world of Solomon's reign.

Hiram had been a friend of David, and now he continues this friendship with Solomon his son. 2 Samuel chapter 10 illustrates the way that the transition from one king to another could be a time when foreign relations could break down. No such thing happens with Solomon and Hiram, however.

Solomon is a just, wise and gracious suzerain, with very positive relations with his vassal Hiram. Hiram does over and above what Solomon requests. There are clearly good relations between them.

He gives Cyprus in addition to Cedar. His own men will transport the wood south. When he presents his terms to Solomon, Solomon is clearly happy to accept them without any dispute.

In verse 12, all of this is traced back to the Lord's gift of wisdom to Solomon. The arrangement between Solomon and Hiram is an important example of the riches of foreign lands being brought into the house of the Lord. Solomon is a mature Adam.

He is a man with the knowledge of good and evil. He is a man who is gathering the manifold treasures from the lands of Havila and elsewhere, and bringing them into this new Eden to dress the garden of the Lord. Solomon is a man who names the creation.

He gathers great trees and massive stones, mastering the earth. He is building his own Eden. With peace on all sides, he can finally bring the nation into its long-awaited Sabbath.

And it isn't merely Cedars and Cypresses, but the Gentiles honouring the name of the Lord. The riches of the Gentiles are coming in, and the food of Israel is being given to the nations, so that they can also share in God's good gifts and feast with the people of the

Lord. This might remind us of figures such as Melchizedek or Jethro, and anticipate figures such as Cyrus and the Magi.

In each case, the Gentiles are recognising and blessing the people of the Lord. All of this is preparing for the construction of the temple, which will be the great jewel in the kingdom, the house of rest for the Lord, the one who has given them this peace on every side, and the prosperity that they are currently enjoying. Solomon speaks of the building of the temple in terms of the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7. He relates the peace that the land enjoys with the blessing and the promise of the Lord, and he desires to build the temple that will be the great culmination of that peace, the peace that the nation is enjoying in the fulfilment of God's word.

A question to consider. What about the character of wisdom is on display in this chapter? Hebrews chapter 4 verses 1 to 13. Although his works were finished from the foundation of the world, for he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way.

And God rested on the seventh day from all his works. And again in this passage he said, They shall not enter my rest. Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience.

Again he appoints a certain day, today, saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. The author of Hebrews presents the experience of the Christians to whom he is writing in terms of the experience of the generation of the children of Israel in the wilderness during the exodus. Like the Israelites, they are in a realm between realms, no longer in Egypt, but not yet having entered into the rest of the awaited promise.

They must faithfully persevere. Hebrews chapter 4 is part of an argument that the writer has been developing since the preceding chapter, expounding Psalm 95 verses 7 to 11 and exhorting the people in terms of it. Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massa in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

For forty years I loathed that generation and said, they are a people who go astray in their heart and they have not known my ways. Therefore I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. As Paul does in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, he encourages the heroes of the epistle to consider themselves in terms of the experience of Israel, learning from their cautionary example.

All of the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, but on account of their unbelief, an entire generation perished in the wilderness before entering into the land, into the rest that God had promised them. The people to whom Hebrews is written are the people of Christ, who is greater than Moses. Moses was the one who led the Israelites, and they need to learn from the failures of the people of Moses.

If Hebrews chapter 3 mostly looks back to the cautionary example of the wilderness generation of the Israelites, reading the verses from Psalm 95 against the backdrop of Numbers chapter 14 and the judgment that came upon them, Hebrews chapter 4 focuses upon looking forward to the rest promised to us, and reads the verses from Psalm 95 against the backdrop of Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 to 3, where God first establishes the Sabbath. In chapter 4 verse 1, the fear is repeated, not so much in terms of rebellion and punishment as it was earlier, but in terms of missing out on promise. As in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, the point is strengthened by heightening the awareness of an analogy between the experience of the Christians that are being addressed in the epistle, and the experience of Israel.

Good news! A gospel came to Israel, just as it had come in their days. However, the good news of the rest of the promised land that the Israelites received did them no good, as they failed to grasp hold of it by faith. The seed of the word fell on poor soil.

True faith effectively receives the promise of God, responds with obedience, and holds fast to him. Those who believe do enter into the promised rest, the rest that is testified to, even in the warning of Psalm 95 verse 11. That rest is God's own Sabbath rest.

It's established when he first created the world. At this point, he's moving from the unbelief of the wilderness generation that we should learn from, and focusing upon the promise that is still held out to us. Psalm 95's mention of rest was not merely about the promised land of Canaan being offered to the wilderness generation.

It looked beyond that, to entering into the fullness of God's Sabbath rest, the rest that is described in Genesis chapter 2. This movement from the immediate promise of entry into the land, to promise of entry into a greater, a more fundamental, and more permanent rest, is already anticipated in the Psalm, which takes the historical statement made to the wilderness generation, and addresses it in the present to those singing and hearing the Psalm. They are expected to recognize that behind the historic rest of the land promised to Israel is a greater rest. The very fact that entering God's rest is spoken of as it is in Psalm 95, implies something that is still open for us.

God promised that people would one day enter into his rest, a promise that looks all the way back to Genesis chapter 2, where God rested from his work in creation on the Sabbath day. This promise remains. It's a fact testified to by the word today, within Psalm 95, from David's day.

This clearly demonstrates that even though Joshua brought them into the land, this did not achieve full entry into God's rest. Canaan wasn't the great Sabbath for which they had been waiting. Even as they enjoyed the land of Canaan, Israel recognized that there were sojourners and pilgrims awaiting a greater homeland.

Hebrews chapter 11 verses 13 to 16 and 39 to 40 say, These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

This notion is not novel to the New Testament. Leviticus chapter 25 verse 23 declares, Even when settled in the land, Israel still hasn't truly arrived at rest and their true homeland. Consequently, there remains a Sabbath rest for us to look forward to and to strive to enter as the people of God, Jews and Gentiles alike.

The heroes of Hebrews faced the same danger as the Israelites of the wilderness generation. If they didn't strive to enter into God's rest, they could fall short through disobedience, like the Israelites. The word of the living God is itself living and powerful to discern and to test the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

As God speaks, he exposes hearts. Every creature is naked and exposed in God's sight, to him to whom we must give account. Faced with the wonderful continued promise of rest, the fearful risk of falling short of it and the unmasking power of the word of God, we must respond to that dividing word with faith, holding on firmly to the promise of sharing in God's Sabbath and entering into it.

A question to consider, where in the Old Testament might we see a connection between God's rest on the Sabbath day and his work of bringing Israel into the land?