

Ecclesiastes 2:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

Analysis

I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards—the triple emphasis on 'me/myself' (li, 'ל) reveals the heart of Solomon's experiment: self-aggrandizement through accomplishment. The Hebrew *higdalti* (הִגְדַּלְתִּי, I made great) indicates ambitious projects on massive scale. Archaeological evidence confirms Solomon's extensive building program: the Temple (1 Kings 6), royal palace complex (1 Kings 7), chariot cities, fortifications (1 Kings 9:15-19).

Vineyards symbolized prosperity and peace (1 Kings 4:25). Yet verse 11 reveals the outcome: 'all was vanity and vexation of spirit.' Human achievement, however magnificent, cannot fill the God-shaped void. Only accomplishment pursued for God's glory, not self-glory, has eternal significance (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Historical Context

Solomon's building projects consumed seven years for the Temple and thirteen for his palace (1 Kings 6:38, 7:1). He employed 150,000 workers (1 Kings 5:13-16), imported cedar from Lebanon, bronze from Cyprus, gold abundantly. His architectural achievements rivaled Egypt and Mesopotamia. Song of Solomon references his vineyards (Song 8:11-12). Yet Ecclesiastes reveals even these magnificent works couldn't provide ultimate meaning.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'great works' are you building to establish your significance, and how might they prove as empty as Solomon's if pursued for self-glory?
2. How does building for God's kingdom rather than personal legacy transform the meaning of your work and accomplishments?

Interlinear Text

הִגַּדְתִּי לִּי	מַעֲשֵׂי י	בִּנֵּי יִתִּי	לִי	בָּתֵּי יִם	נָטַע עֲתִי	לִי
I made me great	works	I build	H0	me houses	I planted	H0
H1431	H4639	H1129		H1004	H5193	

כִּרְמִי:
me vineyards
H3754

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 5:1 (Parallel theme): Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

Psalms 49:11 (Parallel theme): Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.

1 Chronicles 27:27 (Parallel theme): And over the vineyards was Shimei the Ramathite: over the increase of the vineyards for the wine cellars was Zabdi the Shiphmite:

Genesis 11:4 (Parallel theme): And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

1 Kings 15:19 (Parallel theme): There is a league between me and thee, and between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent unto thee a present of silver and gold; come and break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me.

1 Kings 9:1 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do,

2 Chronicles 26:10 (Parallel theme): Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry.

2 Chronicles 8:11 (Parallel theme): And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come.

Daniel 4:30 (Parallel theme): The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

2 Samuel 18:18 (Parallel theme): Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.