

1 Kings 3-4

Chapter 1

The Wisdom of Solomon

Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to the establishment of the reign of Solomon. First it is mentioned that he marries a daughter of Pharaoh. This speaks to his political alliance and the relative importance of the Kingdom that his father David had built. It is also a hint at the downfall of Solomon as we know that his foreign wives will eventually be his greatest weakness. The author states in 3:3 that Solomon loved the Lord... but he offered sacrifices on the high places. There seems to be some legitimate places of worship before the temple is built in Jerusalem. God honors the one at Gibeon in Benjamin by appearing to Solomon in a dream there. But we also know that it is just a short drive to combining the worship of God at these places with the worship of the Canaanite gods because they were worshiped at high places. However, the text begins favorably by describing how God appears to Solomon in a dream and offers him whatever he wants – Solomon chooses wisdom and demonstrates humility in his request. His request is for the benefit of those he is to rule – so that he might govern and judge between right and wrong. God is pleased with his wise choice and then grants him wealth, victory over his enemies, and long life as a divine blessing and a result of wisdom. The message from God ends with a statement of, “If you walk in obedience to my laws as your father David did...” He then returns to the ARK in Jerusalem which is the symbol of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

This story is then followed by an account that demonstrates the wisdom of Solomon to rule in justice. It is the famous story of the two prostitutes and the dispute over the baby. Solomon demonstrates certain attributes that stand as an example to kings: First he is accessible to the poor and needy of his kingdom: He sees a case of two prostitutes and a baby – representing widows and orphans – the most vulnerable groups in society. He listens to discern the truth from the testimony of the women. He creatively acts to determine the content of the heart not just the actions of the women. And finally he shows mercy by not judging the acts of negligence/murder or prostitution, but rather saves the life of a child and reunites him with his true, loving mother. This case becomes evidence to the people of divine wisdom to administer justice. There is a lot for us to learn as we examine this story.

Contrasting David and Solomon.

The account of Solomon and the two prostitutes can be contrasted with David and the folly of his actions with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–12). David and Solomon each make a choice, live with the consequences of their choice, and are scrutinized by the effect their choice has on others. The choice of wisdom or folly involves an act, its consequence, and an evaluation.

David's folly began with the Ammonite war (2 Sam. 10–12) and resulted in the death of a child and in continual conflict within his family, until it was finally resolved with the execution of Adonijah. The curse of conflict in the house of David was only resolved with the enthronement of Solomon, whose kingship was validated by the giving of wisdom at Gibeon and the celebration before the ark in Jerusalem. **In contrast** to David's adultery, Solomon is then confronted with two prostitutes, who are functionally widows, since they have no male to protect them or provide for them. His intervention results in saving the life of a child as well as the unqualified support of all the people for his function as king.

The pattern of act, consequence, and evaluation is totally different for Solomon. Solomon, in seeking divine favor, leaves his capital to offer sacrifices at Gibeon, where wisdom comes to him in a dream. David sleeps by day in his capital and desires what is abhorrent to God. David seeks satisfaction for himself, while Solomon is concerned about duty to the people. The wise king can judge between two prostitutes; the immoral king commits adultery and brings a curse upon his house. The wicked king lives with deceit, trickery, and murder; the wise king receives riches, honor, and a long life. The judgment on the wicked king is brought before "all Israel" (2 Sam. 12:10–12), while "all Israel" holds the wise king in reverence (1 Kings 3:28).

These two stories show us that the ways of wisdom lead to life and peace, while the ways of folly lead to destruction and death. This contrast of folly and wisdom in the birth and accession of Solomon does not determine the final valuation of the lives of David and Solomon. David is the servant king who becomes the standard by which all later kings are measured (1 Kings 15:11; 2 Kings 18:3; 22:2). David's confession of his sin (2 Sam. 12:13) and his choice of Solomon as king (1 Kings 1:30), who loves the Lord and asks for wisdom, redeems him from the folly of his ways. Solomon, by contrast, does not escape the ways of folly. The verdict on his reign is that he does what is wrong in Yahweh's opinion (11:6) (August H. Konnel: *NIV Application Commentary*, pg. 87)

Chapter 4

This chapter extends the discussion of the wisdom of Solomon but not in his ability to judge but his ability to organize and administrate the kingdom that he had been given. David built the kingdom by fighting back Israel's enemies but Solomon will demonstrate his wisdom by choosing loyal people, creating an efficient structure, and skillfully negotiating the borders of the Kingdom with neighbors. In 4:1-6 he chose people who were part of the faction that helped him rise to power – namely godly men like Nathan, Zadok, and their sons. He then creates 12 administrative districts that are not the old Tribal structures of the period of the Judges. He appoints a governor over each district and gives them the responsibility to provide the supplies for the functioning of the central government for one month.

4:20 tells us that the people were numerous and happy and well fed. Solomon's Kingdom stretched from the Euphrates River in the north to the border with Egypt in the south including domination of the land of the Philistines. This is a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham – his descendants have finally accomplished what was promised. This is important to the covenant. The reign of David-Solomon constitute the Golden Age of the people of Israel. This is further established by the literature that is produced by Solomon at this time – Proverbs, Psalms, and even scientific discussions as well as fame in all the region.

In spite of all of the wonderful things that Solomon was doing for Israel there are warning signs that cause the observer to question. Remember, the Former Prophets, of which 1 Kings is one, are concerned with the application of the book of Deuteronomy to the history of the people in the land that God gave them. If you return to Deuteronomy 17:16-17 we begin to see how Solomon is setting the stage for the judgment of God already. He is acting like the kings of the world. Even though he has wisdom from God he is choosing man's way not God's way. It is possible to be God-chosen, God-gifted and God-blessed and still make decisions that eventually will lead you and your descendants away from God. Even if we are successful as a business person, as a church leader or as a congregation, we can follow the patterns of the world that will eventually lead us away from the will of God. It take careful vigilance to stay on God's path and that is why Deuteronomy 17:18 says that the King must keep the scriptures with him and be committed to their study.