

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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1 KINGS 3-5 SOLOMON'S GOLDEN REIGN; TEMPLE BUILT



In the last study, we saw that David died and Solomon has taken care of his enemies. It is interesting what Halley says about David: "In a world of idolatry, and in a nation that was continually falling into idolatry, David stood like a rock for God. In every circumstance of life, he went directly to God, in prayer, in thanks or in praise. His two great accomplishments were: the Kingdom and the Psalms" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 188).

We now begin with Solomon's golden reign—the apogee of Israel's history. It is awe inspiring, but at the same time, tragic, because of the way it ends. So many blessings were given and such an auspicious start, but it ends up spoiling and corrupting the ruler and eventually, bringing down the entire nation.

As Solomon wrote, and it would turn out to be prophetic of himself, "Wisdom does more good than weapons, but *one sinner can undo a lot of good*. Dead flies can make a whole bottle of perfume stink, and a *little stupidity can cancel out the greatest wisdom*" (Eccl. 9:18-10:1, GNB version).

Solomon begins his reign signing a peace treaty with Egypt, and sealing it with his marriage to the Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 3:1).

Expositor's mentions, "Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter was the seal of a political alliance with Egypt. That such a marriage came about gives some indication of the importance of the kingdom Solomon inherited from his father as well as the decline of Egyptian power at this time.

"Formerly, Egyptian Pharaohs consistently refused to allow their daughters to marry even the most important and powerful foreign kings. In this instance it appears that Pharaoh felt it to be advantageous to ally himself with Solomon, giving him not only his daughter but also Gezer as a wedding gift. This would give him clear trade routes through Palestine. Solomon, on the other hand, could by this means secure his southern border.

"The rendering 'made an alliance with Pharaoh' reflects accurately the literal Hebrew: 'he became Pharaoh's son-in-law,' which stresses the relationship between father-in-law and bridegroom rather than that between the bride and the bridegroom. This was a rather common practice as a means of cementing and maintaining international agreements and securing a nation's borders."

Although his reign began auspiciously enough, there was one thing Solomon did not correct: "And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, *except* that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places" (1 Kings 3:3).

Expositor's comments, "Though conditions generally were very good, there was one matter that needed correcting, the practice of sacrificing at the 'high places.' These were open-air sanctuaries mostly found on hill tops, but also in towns and in valleys...they were mounds or knolls, places of eminence for purposes of worship. The simplest ones had merely an altar, but they might also be more elaborate as in the case of the one at Gibeon.

"The high places were a constant sore point in Israel, and the prophets of God frequently spoke out against them. There were two basic problems with them: (1) they detracted from the principle of the central sanctuary (Deut 12:1-14); and (2) since worship at high places was a Canaanite custom, syncretism was not only a very real danger but an all too common occurrence. Israel was specifically forbidden to utilize pagan high places and altars (Deut 12:2-4), and as soon as God had established his people in the Land of Promise, they were to worship at a sanctuary in the place appointed by God."

So, although the Ark was in Jerusalem, the tabernacle and altar were at Gibeon. As *Expositor's* explains, "There were then, in effect, two tabernacles during David's reign. The one in Gibeon was without the ark; the one in Jerusalem had the ark but not the original trappings of the tabernacle. This state of affairs matched that of the double priesthood of Zadok and Abiathar."

It is at Gibeon, some ten miles northwest of Jerusalem, where God appears to Solomon in a dream and ask him what he most desires. Solomon asked for "an understanding heart." *Expositor's* notes, "Solomon responded to God's gracious offer by a heartfelt expression of gratitude for God's great kindness demonstrated toward David during his lifetime and now also after his death in providing David a son as successor, the first in the line from which Messiah would come. God was able to exercise kindness and express his love toward David because of his responsiveness in seeking God and walking in his ways. The emphasis is on God's kindness rather than on David's righteousness.

“Solomon's declaration showed his true humility before God, as God's pleased response demonstrates. The term ‘little child’ or young lad, relates both to his relative youth and to his inexperience in government. The responsibilities facing Solomon were all the greater in that Israel was God's chosen nation. She had to be governed in accordance with God's precepts if the people were to experience his blessing. A wisdom that God alone could give was needed here.

“Another item of thankfulness and praise is added here--the faithfulness of God to the Abrahamic covenant. The words “too numerous to count or number” reflect the words of God to Abraham in Genesis 13:16. God had greatly blessed and increased Abraham's people in stature and in numbers. Notice that it was not speculative wisdom that Solomon was concerned about. What he asked for was an understanding or discerning heart so that he might be able to govern God's people justly. This quality of a government administration in which truth and justice are paramount and where a life in which the fear of God is at the core is seen fully developed in Isaiah 11:2-5. Here Messiah is depicted as the ideal ruler. Solomon, in seeing the need for these qualities and in seeking them for himself, is in so much a type of the Messiah, the Son of David *par excellence*.

“Matthew 6:33 is well illustrated here. Solomon bypassed the kind of request that most men would commonly make--prosperity, a long life, victory over enemies, etc. He sought the more essential thing, and because of this God promised him the wisdom that he sought in such measure that he would stand alone among men. In addition God granted him what he had not requested--wealth and honor unequalled in his lifetime. In granting Solomon ‘a wise and discerning heart,’ God gave him the ability to judge and rule well. But God here also went beyond Solomon's request and opened up his understanding in areas beyond those having to do with rulership.

“In 1 Kings 3:14, God reminds Solomon of his continued responsibility to walk righteously before God as David had done and as David had enjoined him to do. God's faithfulness to the Davidic covenant remained fixed; but if Solomon wished to enjoy God's fullest blessing, he must walk in accordance with God's will.”

Although Solomon asked well, he failed to ask for the one thing needed to accompany wisdom, and that was *righteous character*. “David would have preferred Solomon's focus to be on acquiring the

understanding and wisdom *to remain faithful in keeping God's laws* (1 Chr. 22:12-13; 28:7, 9; 29:19). It is not enough to judge righteously. A leader must be righteous himself” (*Bible Reading Program*).

Solomon soon showed the wisdom God had given him. Two harlots came to him, each claiming to be the mother of the live and not the dead baby found in the bed, when they awoke in the morning. How was Solomon to know which one had lied? Suddenly, he told the guards to split the live baby in two, and sure enough, the response of each woman showed who was the real mother. The first woman said, “O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him! But the other said, ‘Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him.’ So the king answered, “Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother.’ And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice” (1 K. 3:26-28).

Expositor's adds, “This incident is given to illustrate the unusual sagacity of Solomon. Here was a case where there were no witnesses, so it was impossible to prove by conventional means which of the litigants had a just case. Solomon displayed his extraordinary insight into human nature as well as shocking boldness of action in exposing fraud.”

Next is the section describing Solomon's able government. He had twelve capable governors over the twelve tribes that answered to him. He knew how to delegate responsibilities and multiplied the economic power of the country. *Expositor's* says, “He established a well-organized and strong central government, much stronger than ever before. He developed a system of taxation and forced labor to support a much admired and elaborate governmental structure and his great building projects, foremost being the temple and the palace.”

As a result, they had peace and prosperity. “Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing...And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon” (1 K. 4:20, 25).

Expositor's writes, “Solomon's kingdom was a peaceful and prosperous one. With control over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates, Solomon was able to provide peace and security for his people. The statement that ‘each man [sat] under his own vine and fig tree’ speaks of undisturbed prosperity and became

a favorite catch phrase used by the prophets to indicate the ideal conditions prevailing in Messiah's kingdom (Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). The fact that a man could enjoy the fruit of the vine and the fig tree meant that there was a complete absence of warfare and economic disruption."

Solomon also had a powerful military that served as a deterrent against any potential enemy. "Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen" (1 K. 4:26).

Next, his wisdom is described: "And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore...He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees (botany), from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish (biology and zoology). And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth...came to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (4:29-34).

Expositor's explains, "The one attribute most characteristic of Solomon is wisdom (*hokmah* in Hebrew). Interest in wisdom was widespread in the ancient world. In the Gentile world wisdom was primarily associated with the ability to be successful. It was *not* a speculative discipline but intensely *practical*. It pertained to all walks of life and did not usually deal with pure moral values.

"In the OT *hokmah* is frequently used in the broad sense of skill in craftsmanship or administration, etc. An outstanding example is Ex. 31:3, in which the two craftsmen appointed to make the tabernacle were given wisdom (NIV 'skill') in carrying out their work. This kind of practical wisdom is applied to life as a whole--the art of being successful--how best to make one's way through life. Wise men were those who had unusual insight into human nature and in the problems of life in general. Thus they were sought as advisers to kings and rulers.

"At the very heart, however, of the concept of wisdom in the OT lies the recognition that God is the Author and End of life and that a meaningful or successful life is one that has its focus in God. This finds typical expression in the statement 'The fear of the Lord--that is wisdom' (Job 28:28). He who fears the Lord receives wisdom from him, the ability to see things from God's perspective. Thus true wisdom gives discernment in spiritual and moral matters. It also enables man to discriminate between that which

is helpful and that which is harmful. *Every aspect* of human endeavor is included: *the spiritual, intellectual, secular, and practical*. It covers man's relationship to God as well as his relationship to other men. The expression 'breadth of understanding' means a comprehensive understanding and is illustrated by the numerous areas of knowledge in which Solomon was at home."

As Lord Byron said about this passage, "As the sand on the seashore encloses a great body of water, so Solomon's mind contained an ocean of knowledge."

Next, Solomon establishes a treaty with Hiram, king of Tyre, the capital of Phoenicia (Lebanon). Hiram had been a close friend of David, and is now willing to help young Solomon with the task of building the temple of God. The Phoenicians would provide the precious wood and craftsmen and the Israelites would provide the foodstuff (1 K. 5:10-11).

What was Solomon's secret for the great success in his construction projects, besides God's help? Keller mentions, "Solomon was a thoroughly progressive ruler. He had a flair for exploiting foreign brains and foreign skill and turning them to his own advantage. That was the secret, otherwise scarcely understandable, of how the simple peasant regime of his father David developed by leaps and bounds into a first class economic power...Solomon imported smelting technicians from Phoenicia. Hiram-Abhi, a craftsman from Tyre, was entrusted with the casting of the Temple furnishings. In Ezion-Geber, Solomon founded an important enterprise for overseas trade. The Israelites had never been sailors and knew nothing about shipbuilding. But the Phoenicians had behind them practical experience accumulated over many centuries. Solomon therefore sent to Tyre for specialists for his dockyards and sailors for his ships. 'And Hiram sent his servants with the fleet, seamen who knew the sea...' (1 K. 9:27), (*The Bible as History*, pp. 211-212).