

Solomon's Wisdom

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[0 : 00] The reading today is 1 Kings chapter 3, reading the whole chapter. Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem.

The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord. Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father. Only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places.

And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, Ask what I shall give you.

And Solomon said, You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David, my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you.

And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David, my father, although I am but a little child.

[1 : 16] I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this, your great people? It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

And God said to him, Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word.

Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you, and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour, so that no other king shall compare with you all your days.

And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days. And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream.

[2 : 27] Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings and made a feast for all his servants. Then two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.

The one woman said, Oh my Lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth, and we were alone.

There was no one else with us in the house. Only we two were in the house. And this woman's son died in the night because she lay on him. And she arose at midnight and took my son from beside me while your servant slept and laid him at her breast and laid her dead son at my breast.

When I rose in the morning to nurse my child, behold, he was dead. But when I looked at him closely in the morning, behold, he was not the child that I had born. But the other woman said, No, the living child is mine and the dead child is yours.

The first said, No, the dead child is yours and the living child is mine. Thus they spoke before the king. Then the king said, One says, This is my son that is alive and your son is dead.

[3 : 40] And the other says, No, but your son is dead and my son is the living one. And the king said, Bring me a sword. So a sword was brought before the king.

And the king said, Divide the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other. Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son.

Oh, my Lord, give her the living child and by no means put him to death. But the other said, He shall be neither mine nor yours. Divide him. Then the king answered and said, Give the living child to the first woman and by no means put him to death.

She is his mother. And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered. And they stood in awe of the king because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

Good morning. Simon's prayed. Let's get into One Kings. It's worth saying it's been great to have guests and visitors with us.

[4 : 50] If you would like a Bible and you don't have one, I'd love you to get in touch with me. I'd love to send you one. If you haven't got one handy, you could go to BibleGateway.com and find One Kings.

And you'll be able to follow along with some of the stuff we're looking at today. Well, where do we turn when the world seems to be in a mess?

It's often hard to know who to trust, isn't it? We've got opinions coming from every side. The politicians say one thing. The scientists another. And well, don't even get me started on the whirlwind of Twitter.

What about masks? On or off? Schools? Are they safe or not? We're pulled one way and then the other. It's hard to know who to trust.

Well, we've come to One Kings, volume one of two that together forms the Book of Kings. And it's a great place to be because the world of kings is a messy world like ours.

[5 : 53] It's a topsy-turvy tale of God's people led through turbulent times by a chaotic and broken bunch of leaders. Some of them attempt to be faithful, but all of them lead with sin, frailty and failure.

It's messy. And it's a world where the safety and future of God's people seems to hang in the balance. Where will they turn? And it's just possible in these lockdown days that we feel similar.

Where will we turn? So we come here to One Kings to learn from the history of God's people, our people. And specifically, we're going to spend three Sundays exploring the life of Solomon in One Kings chapters 1 to 11.

It will have to be a whistle-stop tour, so we'll miss some things. But my big hope is that the greatest encouragement will come as we see Solomon point beyond himself, giving us a glimpse of what a perfect king would look like.

This week, we'll focus on Solomon's wisdom in chapters 1 to 4. Next week, we'll think about the massive temple that he builds in 5 to 8. And then after a week's break, Andy's going to help us with chapters 9 to 11.

[7 : 10] As we see, spoiler alert, Solomon's downfall. Well, before we get into the text we read, thanks, Anna, we need to do a little catch-up on chapters 1 and 2.

You see, as we arrive in One Kings, we meet, chapter 1, verse 1, an old, cold, dying King David. He's coming to the end of his life and his reign, therefore, as king over God's people.

Which begs the question, who will rule next? Earlier in David's life, back in 2 Samuel 7, God made a promise that there would forever be a son of David as king over God's people.

So as he dies, who will rule in his place? David seems to have lost all sense of direction. Will the kingdom collapse before it reaches even the next generation?

Or chapter 1 tells the to-and-fro story of David's rogue, me, me, me, me, me, son Adonijah, trying to orchestrate his own coronation. Only for Bathsheba and Nathan to wake David up and get Solomon, the right son, crowned in the nick of time.

[8 : 25] So Adonijah's hopes are popped and David, with his dying breath, gives Solomon a pep talk. Chapter 2, verse 2. I'm about to go the way of all the earth.

Be strong and show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes. Through the rest of chapter 2, Solomon deals with a number of potential threats from inside and outside the kingdom.

And as we reach chapter 3, there's a measure of stability. And we begin to get a fuller picture of Solomon. God's wise king.

Well, let's see what we get of him in chapter 3, verse 1 to 15. Solomon's safely on his throne and he seems to have real potential. David certainly had high hopes.

And this is a huge moment. God promised a son of David would rule forever. So what kind of king will Solomon be? Is he the one? Is Solomon a leader God's people can really trust?

[9 : 31] Well, straight away, the writer of Kings flags up a reason for caution. Solomon is a messy mix of sin and faithfulness.

In chapter 3, verse 1, he's marrying into Egypt and making an alliance with Pharaoh. Which, given God's explicit command to avoid Egypt and the history of the Exodus and God's people being enslaved back then.

Well, it doesn't sound great. But at the same time, we read chapter 3, verse 3. Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David, his father.

Great. But the verse goes on. Only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. Solomon really does love the Lord.

But his heart is divided from the beginning. His offerings to God are essentially pagan shrines. And he's flirting with Egypt. Well, whatever question marks there are, what comes next gives us reason for optimism about Solomon.

[10 : 45] Verse 5. As Solomon worships, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night. And God said, ask what I shall give you.

It's a startling moment. A bit like a genie in a lamp offering three wishes. Only this is the actual God of the universe saying to Solomon. What shall I do for you, Solomon?

Imagine it. God asks you what you want. I wonder what you'd go for. Verse 6 and 7 tell us what Solomon asks.

Verse 7. Oh, Lord, my God, you have made your servant king in place of David, my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in.

And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern this, your great people.

[11 : 52] Of all the things he could have asked for, for power, for skill, for money, for fame.

He asks for an understanding mind, for wisdom. Solomon recognizes his weakness, his lack. He can't do the job before him.

He's like a little child lost in a supermarket, not sure which way to go. So he asks God for directions. Not so that he looks good or can become powerful, but wisdom so he can govern God's great people and discern between good and evil.

At its core, that is what wisdom is, the God given understanding to know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. Solomon tells us in one of his proverbs that ultimately wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

It's making decisions then in light of who God is. And so his request is a positive sign. It's a humble plea for help. And verse 10.

[13 : 08] And it pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, Because you've asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right.

Behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor.

God more than grants Solomon's request. He pours out wisdom and the rest. This is way beyond that surprise at the till when something's cheaper than you thought.

This is out of the park generosity from God. Solomon doesn't deserve it. But God asks what he wants and he loves to deliver.

See, from chapter one onwards, it's clear. The goodness of Solomon's reign is all of God. God works to establish Solomon as king.

[14 : 21] God gives him wisdom to rule well. And we'll see God prospers his reign. It's all from God. And before we get back into the story, a quick note on wisdom, because I think it's undervalued in our culture.

And it struck me reading through One Kings, we prize so many things above wisdom. Now, it's true that God hasn't directly said to us, ask what I shall give you.

But we do pray to the same God as Solomon. He hasn't changed. And James chapter one, verse five is clear. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously.

How good would it be if all our politicians led first and foremost, fearing the Lord and asking him for wisdom to do right? How good would it be if we all lived all of life asking God for wisdom?

Now, we've access to the greatest source of wisdom in the universe. And I wonder if we think like that, if we realise it. I'd say I'm often quicker to go to Google than I am to God.

[15 : 31] So sad. Now, if you're a younger person, don't misuse this. It's not an excuse to avoid schoolwork. But much more valuable than your education is wisdom from God.

Much better, the fear of the Lord than straight A's. And parents, I don't know what having kids is like, but I wonder if you pray more for your children to have wisdom from the Lord.

Or good grades. Are young people hearing from the true source of wisdom at home, around the table or before bed? And each week at church and jam is going to stand them in much better stead than that extra 15 minutes of homework.

And the same is true for us. We need God's wisdom. So let's be a church that really values going to him and asking him for his help.

Back to the story, though, because we need to know what happens when God's king rules God's people. Well, what comes next in chapter three is brilliant.

[16 : 38] We get to see the fruit of Solomon's God-given wisdom. God's wise king brings huge blessing to God's people.

So Solomon has asked for wisdom. God has poured it out in abundance. Then Solomon wakes up, realises what has happened, worships the Lord and puts on a feast to celebrate.

Well, what next? How about a court case to test drive his newly given wisdom? Look how wisdom leads to justice.

In verse 16, we meet two prostitutes. Both had babies, both living in the brothel in the night one baby dies. And the claim is that the woman with the dead baby swaps hers for the living one.

But nobody's around to see. Here you go, Solomon. Here's an easy one to start with. Two mums, one baby. Well, verse 24 gets us to the heart of Solomon's thinking.

[17 : 40] And the king said, bring me a sword. What? Now, I couldn't find a sword.

So I've spoken to a friend and this is the closest I could get. It's a pretty hefty machete. I want you to imagine, if you can, that we're there.

There are two babies, two mums, one baby. Solomon has just asked for a sword. And the sword comes. And verse 25, the king said, divide the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.

Cut him in two, Solomon says. Now, this might seem like a horrific idea to us. Presumably, Solomon wasn't planning to go through with it.

But do you see the wisdom? The sword is raised above the baby, ready to chop it like a guillotine. And as the blade hovers in the air, it causes the true mother to shout, stop!

[18 : 48] Let her have the baby. The true mother is so desperate for her baby to live, she's willing to give him up. And so with that, Solomon has revealed the real mum.

God-given wisdom leads to justice for the right mother. Imagine living under a king of such wisdom, able to discern right from wrong like this.

Not just to decree it, but to be able to put it on display so that everybody can see it. Look how people react in verse 28.

All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered. And they stood in awe of the king because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

It's so good. It's not just justice, though. Solomon's God-given wisdom leads to order. That's why there's this long list in chapter four of appointed officials and officers and governors.

[19 : 57] They're all appointed over the land to govern, to help Solomon. This is the art of delegation. And it leads to yet more blessing.

There's joy, security and peace. Check out 4 verse 20. Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea.

They ate and drank and were happy. Gladness grips God's people. The whole country is joyful because Solomon is a wise king.

I don't know if you've heard of the World Happiness Report. It ranks countries on a number of variables and works out where the happiest places to live are. Top ones are Finland, Denmark, Switzerland.

The UK lies 13th under Australia and Canada. Now, I'd imagine that New Zealand might be doing the best at the moment. But God's people under Solomon would be off the scale number one.

[21 : 02] They're living under the rule of God's king. They're in a prosperous land. They're enjoying God's blessing. This looks just like the fulfillment of everything God's people have been waiting for since back in Genesis 12.

God made a promise back then to Abraham to make his descendants as many as the stars in the sky and to give them a land and to give them blessing under his rule. This looks like it for them.

God's people have everything they need. And verse 24, chapter 4, verse 24. Because Solomon had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates and from Tipsha to Gaza over all the kings west of the Euphrates, and he had peace on all sides around him, Judah and Israel lived in safety.

From Dan to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree. All the days of Solomon. Solomon. It's stunning. Everyone under Solomon has rest and security and peace and happiness.

Now, Lizzie and I are fortunate enough to have a little garden, and we just so happen to have a fig tree. I'm still working on the vine. But over the last few weeks, when time is allowed, some of our happiest, most restful moments have been as we've sat in the garden, with a book and a drink under our fig tree.

[22 : 35] Warm in the sun, but sheltered by its leaves. It's ideal. We love it. And it's a picture of what God's people enjoyed under Solomon.

These years in Solomon's reign were the place to be. We should all have a sense of FOMO. We weren't there. We missed out. And before we draw things together, notice one last blessing of this wisdom.

It overflows. It spreads to every area of life. Have a look at chapter 4, verse 32. Solomon also spoke 3,000 proverbs.

And his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts and of birds and of reptiles and of fish.

Horticulture, zoology, poetry, music, the arts. Solomon's wisdom leads him to be inquisitive about every area of life. Perhaps it was wisdom from God that led Christians to start the earliest universities.

[23 : 44] But notice wisdom also overflows to all the world. Verse 34. People of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. None more so than the Queen of Sheba, who we meet in chapter 10, if you want to read on.

She comes to Solomon with all her questions. And he takes her breath away with his wisdom. Such that she praises his God.

You see, when God's king rules, it flows out and it impacts neighbours and towns and cities and nations all around. So here's where I hope we've got to.

God's wise king brings huge blessing to God's people. Just imagine with me for a moment living under Solomon at this point in history.

Enter the world, if you can, of 1 Kings 3 and 4 for a moment. Eating and drinking with family and friends. Being happy without fear of sickness or getting socially awkward about social distancing.

[24 : 59] Don't you long for days like these? Especially in our current time. Well, imagine further. Let's take a trip back to Old Testament history for a moment.

Imagine further. You're the first people reading this. Solomon has died. Other kings have come and gone. God's kingdom itself is a mere stump in the ground.

Barely still in existence. The glory days have left. You're being oppressed on all sides by fierce enemies. It's a total mess. And it feels like God has forgotten you.

There you go to what's left of the meager temple. And you find the scroll of 1 Kings and you read about Solomon.

How much more then would you long for these glory days to return? How much more would you long for a better Solomon to come and rule and reestablish God's kingdom?

[26 : 03] Now, these verses would have made God's people long for a better king. Well, we noted with the author's help, Solomon's heart was divided from the beginning with foreign wives and pagan worship.

But there were other glimpses we skipped over, like his collection of horses, which God had explicitly forbidden the king to collect back in Deuteronomy 17. More on that in a few weeks.

The main thing to see, though, is that Solomon lets us down. And his failures, they point beyond him because he's not the two Samuel son to rule forever.

There must be another. So we're drawn to the family tree of David to see who will be that forever king.

And when Jesus appears, we realize it's him. So in Matthew chapter one, in the first verses of the New Testament, we read a long genealogy that goes from Adam through Abraham, through David, through Solomon and culminates in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 19] This is the moment. And then as he grows up and works stunning miracles, bringing prosperity and peace to many, pointing to the kind of kingdom he's going to establish.

And as he teaches and answers people with out of this world wisdom, we realize this is it. As Luke 11 puts it, one greater than Solomon is here.

Paul grounds it for us in his letter to the Colossian church in chapter two, verse three. It's there on the sermon outline. He calls Jesus Christ. He calls Jesus Christ.

And he says, It's on our houses where enemies are gone and God is the center of our praise and the source of our joy.

A kingdom where broken, sinful people like you and me are forgiven and welcomed.

[29 : 11] All by grace. Let's come back to that question we started with. Where do we turn when the world is in a mess?

Well, the answer isn't to try and wise up and be like Solomon. Instead, the answer is to take after the two prostitutes in the story earlier.

In their mess, they went to their wise king. And we do likewise. In this messy world, in our brokenness, we go to King Jesus for wisdom and much, much more.

He rules over this world with wisdom. He knows exactly what he's doing and nothing takes him by surprise. And if that's true. And if that's true.

We've got to assume that he will never allow anything in our circumstances, except that which is in line with his highest and best wisdom.

[30 : 14] So a friend mentioned just yesterday in the midst of a really hard situation. It makes such a difference to know that Jesus rules.

Even when we don't understand what he's doing and we go through situations we can't fathom. He knows what he's doing. And likewise, knowing Jesus is the ultimate wise king helps enormously when he says things we struggle to believe.

Well, we don't like to hear. The rest of kings will raise all sorts of issues from parenting to leadership to priorities to who to marry. And Jesus speaks about those kinds of things, too.

With God's wisdom and authority. If he is the wisest king. We can trust he wouldn't say anything he didn't think best for our eternal good.

So where do we turn when the world seems to be in a mess? When we're not sure who to trust. Well, the story of one king is one to four.

[31 : 21] And in fact, the story of the whole Bible exclaims. Whoever you are. Trust the king who is greater than Solomon. Trust God's wise king, Jesus.

Blessing to God's people. There's no one like him. Let's pray. Our father, we.

Put our trust in all sorts of places. In our careers. In our family lives. In our holidays.

Even in our little gardens. But none of those things can bring us the joy and peace and security that we need and we long for. And so we pray.

Help us, please, to put all our trust in the Lord Jesus. The one who promises and is bringing in an eternal kingdom. Help us to trust him each day.

[32 : 23] And we pray to you in his name. Amen.