

Make a Wish . . . Any Wish

Solomon: The Renaissance King – Part I

I Kings 3; II Chronicles 1

Introduction

If you could write pearls of wisdom for others to read, what would they be? One author, by the name of Jack Brown, collected gems from hundreds of people of various ages. Let me give a few of them:

- A sixty-four year old said, “I’ve learned that most of the things I worry about never happen.”
- Another said, “I’ve learned that when someone says something unkind about me, I will live so that no one will believe it.”
- One twenty-nine year old parent said, “I’ve learned that parents of other children know just how you should raise yours.”
- A forty-six year old said, “I’ve learned that you can get by on charm for about fifteen minutes. After that, you’d better know something.”
- This one reminded me of our last discussion on putting the important activities in your life before the unimportant – a senior citizen said, “I’ve learned that the great challenge of life is to decide what’s important and to ignore everything else.”

There were also some gems that were simple, home-spun advice. Here are a few:

- One man said, “I’ve learned that homemade Toll House cookies should be eaten warm.”
- A four year said, “I’ve learned you can’t hide a piece of broccoli in your glass of milk.”

(Can’t you just see the kid trying, but it keeps floating to the top! Oh, no, I have never tried that!)

- Here is another gem about handling vegetables – a seven year old said, “I’ve learned that if you spread the peas out on your plate, it looks like you ate more.” (Now I have tried that, just last night, and it did not work!)

There were a couple more gems on wisdom. They include:

- One said, “I’ve learned that wisdom is the intelligence that keeps you from getting into situations that require – wisdom.”
- One more, “I’ve learned that a person begins cutting his wisdom teeth the first time he bites off more than he can chew.”

As we study the life of King Solomon, if there were a gem to describe the drama that he finds himself in, it is that last one. The curtain has just risen, and young Solomon is standing in the center of the stage. All eyes are on him.

There is a debate about how old he was. Most believe he was still a teenager! Whatever his young age may have been, however, he is now the king over all of Israel.

Chapter 2 of I Kings gives us the first few events surrounding the accession of Solomon to his father David’s throne. It is a violent, bloody chapter where, as I mentioned in our previous discussion, Solomon is left to handle the compromises David allowed in the

kingdom. This involves, namely, that justice be meted out for enemies of the throne.

So, the first decrees recorded from Solomon relate to the deaths of a general, named Joab, Solomon's half brother Adonijah, and that old snake, Shimei. It was not a pleasant, peaceful start, but it was necessary to ensure that Solomon would reign as God's chosen successor to his father's throne.

I want to start digging into the life of Solomon today, as we begin a series of biographical studies about this "Renaissance King". I use that name, because, without a doubt, Solomon was indeed the king over Israel's flourishing age.

The Birth of Solomon

In order to understand the most colorful, brilliant king that Israel would ever claim, we need to begin with his birth. Please turn your attention first, to II Samuel, chapter 12.

The context of this passage is the death of David and Bathsheba's baby boy. The conception of this child was the result of their adulterous union. The entire household of David was in an uproar as Nathan, the prophet, had boldly confronted the king's sin. At some point, during this period in David's life, he penned Psalm, chapter 51, which was his personal poem of confession.

Soon after the death of their son, Bathsheba, now David's wife, conceived again. Notice verse 24a.

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. . . .

Names, at this time, conveyed significant hopes and aspirations. David is the strong warrior whose life has been one series of crises after another, followed by a fall into the mire of sin and experiencing the loss of fellowship with His God and the loss of integrity among his followers. Finally, there is repentance, followed by the death of his child by Bathsheba. But the God of grace allowed Bathsheba to have another baby, another boy, and as David cradles him in his arms, he names him "Shalom," or Solomon, which means, "peace".

It is as if David marks the birth of Solomon as a time of peace. There is now peace within his own household, peace within his own heart, and, ultimately, peace from restored fellowship with God.

The Training of Solomon

God, however, has a special name picked out for him as well. We read it only one time in the scriptures. It is found in verses 24b through 25 of II Samuel, chapter 12.

. . . Now the Lord loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the Lord's sake.

Jedidiah simply means, "loved by God".

Nathan's involvement with the naming of the young baby boy has led many to believe that he served as Solomon's tutor, throughout his young years.

What I find most interesting is the thought that Lemuel, perhaps yet another name for Solomon, was a nickname given to him by his mother, Bathsheba. The name appears only once and that is in chapter 31 of Proverbs. The name simply means "unto God". It is as if Bathsheba had promised the Lord that this child would belong to God.

Most Old Testament writers believe, from Proverbs, chapter 31, that Solomon, called Lemuel, records for us the words that his mother taught him. They are words of great wisdom and insight. You should read the chapter sometime, with the conscious thought that these words are coming from Bathsheba's lips.

In fact, throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon repeatedly urges his readers to not only listen to the teaching of their father, but to the teaching of their mother. Let us look at several of these passages.

- Proverbs, chapter 1, verses 8 and 9,

Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching; indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head and ornaments about your neck.

- Listen to Solomon's obvious love and deep affection for his mother as he writes, in chapter 4, verses 3 and 4a.

When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words . . .

- In Proverbs, chapter 6, verse 20, Solomon commands,

My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother

This is incredible when you consider that the mother Solomon refers to, and the wise counsel that he was reared to follow was the teaching and counsel of not just David, but Bathsheba. Bathsheba was a woman with a shady past, but evidently, a woman who came to love and know deeply the God of Israel. She would pass on to the young prince, the things she had learned.

So, Solomon was reared under the counsel and teaching of Nathan, the godly prophet, and Bathsheba. If there is a principle in this for us, it could be this,

God's grace can be found at work, regardless of your past.

Certainly, there can be lasting limitations to sin. With David, this was true, for Nathan told him, by the word of the Lord, that, as recorded in II Samuel, chapter 12, verse 10, because of his sin, the sword would never depart from his house. However, God's grace would continue to work and a young prince would grow up at the feet of a developing, maturing woman; a woman who would, ultimately, become the teacher of millions of believers. By reading the book of Proverbs, believers indirectly read and study some of the instruction she gave to her son Solomon.

One of the hidden stories of these chapters is the story of grace, that is revealed and developed in the life of Bathsheba.

The Inauguration of Solomon

Now, I want to fast forward this biography of Solomon and take you to the inauguration of Solomon. It is found in I Kings, chapter 3, so, turn there, please. The same account is given in II Chronicles, chapter 1. We will focus on Jeremiah's account in I Kings, chapter 3.

Three "firsts" for Solomon

We have time to focus on three things; three "firsts" for Solomon. They are: his first wife, his first recorded acts of worship, and his first and only wish.

Solomon's first wife

Look at I Kings, chapter 3, verse 1, to learn of Solomon's first wife.

Then Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to the city of David until he had finished building

his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem.

This was a political move to ensure that Israel's ancient taskmaster, Egypt, acted as an ally rather than an enemy. While the marriage was never specifically condemned by the Law, as only intermarriage with the Canaanite nations was, it shows us how, early on, the door was cracked open for Solomon's later fall. It would be Solomon's foreign wives who would turn his heart away from God.

Solomon's first recorded acts of worship

Look at verses 2 through 4 of I Kings, chapter 3, to read of Solomon's first recorded acts of worship.

The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days. Now Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except the sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

At first glance, this also sounds like direct disobedience. He has barely ascended to the throne and he has married an Egyptian and now, he is sacrificing on some strange high altar.

The word "except," in verse 3, seems to indicate that Solomon was doing everything right "except" for the fact that he sacrificed at Gibeon. I even read a couple of lengthy sermons that highlighted the word "except;" that highlighted that Solomon was walking righteously "except"! In fact, I thought, at first, that my sermon would be built around the ungodly exceptions in Solomon's life.

The trouble is, the companion volume to I Kings provides an explanation, not a condemnation. Turn to II Chronicles, chapter 1, and look at verses 3 through 5.

Then Solomon and all the assembly with him went to the high place which was at Gibeon, for God's tent of meeting was there, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness. However, David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim to the place he had prepared for it, for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. Now the bronze altar, which Bezalel the son of Uri,

the son of Hur, had made, was there before the tabernacle of the Lord, and Solomon and the assembly sought it out.

In other words, Solomon followed his father David in everything, except that David sacrificed in Jerusalem, where the ark was, and Solomon sacrificed at Gibeon, where Moses' tabernacle was. *God honored both!* There went my sermon idea, "out the window"!

It is amazing how the Bible can ruin a good sermon! By the way, that is a good warning for all of us. Whether we are teaching, preaching, or listening, we need to make sure we compare what we say and hear to the Word, no matter how convincing or attractive something other than the Word may be.

Continue to verse 6.

Solomon went up there before the Lord to the bronze altar which was at the tent of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

Do you know what Solomon is doing? He is beginning his reign by publicly acknowledging his love and commitment to the God of Israel.

Solomon's first and only wish

Now, notice what God does. Turn back to I Kings, chapter 3, and look at verse 5.

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you."

God said, "Make a wish, Solomon, . . . any wish!"

Imagine! In effect, God is saying, "Solomon, here's a blank check. Write anything you want on the top line!"

What kid has not laid in bed and thought, "Man, if I had three wishes!"

The other day, while taking my kids to school, I asked, "If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?"

I needed a sermon illustration! The number one answer for my first and third graders was, "I wish I could fly."

If it will encourage those of you who are parents, some kids will actually try. I read recently, about Leo Tolstoi. He was the biblical scholar who, as a nine year old, convinced himself that he could indeed fly, if he placed total faith in God. So, he jumped out of his

second story bedroom window – and became fairly disappointed in God!

This is every kid's dream.

One of my sons came home recently, and said that another one of his playmates at school was born again; saved. That was the second kid in just the last few days. So, I decided to ask the little evangelist some questions; like, "Did you actually pray with them?"

"Oh, yes sir, right on the playground."

I thought, "Wow!"

Then, I asked, "What do you pray?"

He said, "I lead them in a prayer that they repeat after me, like you do at church."

That sounded right. So, I asked, "Well, son, how do you bring up the subject?"

"Oh, that's easy."

I said, "Really?"

"Yeah, Dad, I just ask my friends, 'Hey, do you want to be able to fly one day and walk on water?' and they say, 'Sure do.' and we pray!"

His theology was sound, but his motivational methods were questionable!

For adults, having our dreams come true is quite a bit different, but they are still "pipe dreams". For example:

- What color Jaguar do you sign up for, just in case you win the Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes? How many of you know what I am talking about? Don't lie!
- A teenage mother's wish is that her thirteen year old would say one evening, "Mom, you sure have worked hard today, you sit down and rest and I'll clean up the kitchen."
- Every man wishes the mechanic would say, "That strange sound and billowing blue smoke is nothing at all. I just need to tighten the fan belt and clean the battery cables."
- Some wish the state patrolman would say, "You were only going 55 miles per hour? I apologize, my radar must not be working today. I'm sorry to bother you."
- A young mother's wish is that her three year old would run around the house saying, "Yes, Mommy. Yes, Mommy. Yes!"

- A wife's wish is that her husband would come home to leftovers and say, "Tuna casserole again? Great!"

By the way wives, if your husband complains, try this. One woman was overheard saying to her friend, "I have the perfect recipe for meatloaf, it works for me every time. I simply mention it to my husband and he says, 'Let's go out to eat tonight.'"

If you did get your wish, what would you want? Well, believe it or not, Solomon was given one wish . . . any wish! Look at I Kings, chapter 3, verse 6.

Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day."

You could write one word besides this verse in the margin of your Bible. It is the word, "gratitude". In effect, Solomon is saying, "Lord, You have done so many wonderful things, and You have given me so much already. You have given me my heritage and my holy calling!"

If God were to come to us and say, "Ask anything and I'll do it."

How many of us would stop, before we began asking for our grocery list of items, long enough to say, "Oh, Lord, You have already done so much. I want to thank You for that."?

The next verse could also be marked with one word. It is the word "humility". Look at verse 7.

Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.

Can you imagine an eighteen or nineteen year old saying, "I need help."?

This is a time in their lives when they know how to do more than people will give them credit for and, if others would just get out of their way, they could change the world. At that time in his life, a teenager named Solomon, said, "God, I don't know how to do this . . . I can't even find the front door."

Contrast Solomon with his brothers Absalom and Adonijah. They knew they could be the king. They

knew how to lead the nation! They said, "I will be king!"

Solomon said, in verse 7a,

. . . You have made Your servant king in place of my father David . . .

In other words, "I am who I am because You made me!"

I love the statement by the reformer Martin Luther, who once said,

God made the worlds out of nothing, and when you and I consider ourselves nothing, He can create something out of us as well.

I have, scrolling across the screen of my computer, whenever it is on and not in use, a quote by missionary Hudson Taylor, who impacted China for God. He said,

God chose me because I was weak enough and quiet enough and small enough to be used by Him.

Now, notice verse 8.

Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted.

The word, in this verse, that is translated "a great people," can be literally be translated as, "a heavy people". In other words, "Lord, leading this people will be a heavy thing. I'm not sure my shoulders are quite broad enough."

Have you ever felt like Solomon? You have a responsibility as a parent, or a teacher, or an executive, or a housewife, or a student, and you might think, "Man, this calling is a heavy burden."

For those of you who take your role in life seriously, who feel the weight of responsibility, who go to the Lord with the words, "Lord, life is heavy," you are the ones who can make the wish Solomon made, and see the wish come true. As the New Testament book of James tells us, in chapter 1, verses 2 through 5, and I will quote Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, which is outstanding,

Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides.

That is another way of saying, "when life gets heavy".

You know that under pressure, your faith is forced into the open . . . don't try to get out of anything prematurely . . . let it do its work

so you become mature and well-developed . . . if you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father . . . He loves to help . . .

My New American Standard translation then reads, in verse 5,

. . . if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach . . .

Let us continue to the heart of Solomon's wish, in verse 9 of I Kings, chapter 2.

So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?

The words translated "an understanding heart," are literally, "a hearing heart"! Solomon asked for a "hearing heart".

Walter Wangerin wrote, "Wisdom is none other than the ability to listen."

I like the way one man put it, "Listening is the way to gain wisdom, because everything you say, you already know."

Now I am convinced that every one of us has a hearing heart. The question is, "What are we listening for?"

Solomon is requesting a "hearing heart" tuned into "godly discernment".

In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Pastor Ed Young told the story of two men who were walking down a sidewalk in Manhattan. One man was a native American Indian and the other was a born and bred New Yorker. The noise was incredible. There were cars, buses, horns, sirens, and people talking loudly as they moved down the street, jammed shoulder to shoulder in the chaos.

Suddenly, the Indian said, "Listen. I hear a cricket. Do you hear it?"

The New Yorker was astounded. He said, "No way! You couldn't possibly hear a cricket on a Manhattan sidewalk during rush hour."

"I'm serious," the Indian man countered, and to prove it, he stopped, bent down, and picked up a cricket from between a crack in the sidewalk.

"How could you hear it?" the New Yorker asked.

"Easy," said his friend, "I've lived outdoors all my life. My ears are tuned to sounds like this and I can hear a cricket in spite of lots of other noise."

Then the Indian said, "Watch this."

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a quarter, and dropped it onto the concrete. As soon as it hit the sidewalk, every head turned. Everyone heard it.

You hear what you are listening for. Our ears pick up the sounds to which they are tuned.

The question is, "What do our hearts hear?"

Solomon's wish is that his heart would be tuned into hearing wisdom; that he would be able to discern between good and evil. In other words, that God would give him an instinct for the truth.

"That is my wish, Lord, give me a hearing heart!"

God's response to Solomon's wish – Four gifts granted to Solomon

Now in the next few verses of I Kings, chapter 3, beginning with verse 11, God responds to Solomon's wish and He grants four things to Solomon.

Gift #1 - Discernment

Notice verse 12 to find the first gift that God grants to Solomon.

behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.

So, gift number one is discernment. We will reveal Solomon's discernment in our next discussion.

Gift #2 - Wealth

God, however, is not yet finished. Notice verse 13 for the second gift that God grants to Solomon.

I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor . . .

So, gift number two is wealth. Scholars estimate that Solomon's weekly paycheck would have been 1.4 million dollars. II Chronicles, chapters 1 and 9, tell us that Solomon made silver and gold as common as ordinary stones. And, in the first year of Solomon's reign, his intake of gold articles and coins, as tributes from surrounding nations, weighed sixty five tons.

Turn to I Kings, chapter 10. Look at verses 18 through 24 and just try to imagine this!

Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with refined gold.

There were six steps to the throne and a round top to the throne at its rear, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions [ivory and gold] standing beside the arms.

Twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like it was made for any other kingdom.

All Kings Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. None was of silver; it was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon.

For the king had at sea the ships of Tarshish with the ships of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks.

So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.

All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart.

Gift #3 – Honor

The third additional blessing that God gives to Solomon is honor, or fame.

The chronicler informs us, in II Chronicles, chapter 9, of when the great Queen of Sheba came to see, for herself, the kingdom of Solomon. Look at verses 3 through 6.

When the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, the house which he had built, the food at his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his ministers and their attire, his cupbearers and their attire, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, she was breathless. Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless I did not believe their reports until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told me. You surpass the report that I heard."

Gift #4 – Long life

Finally, in the last part of I Kings, chapter 3, verse 14, God gives Solomon the promise of long life. Look at that verse.

If you walk in My ways . . . then I will prolong your days.

In Solomon's day, he will compose and collect about three thousand gems of wisdom that we call proverbs, and he will write about five thousand songs. While we all want to rush ahead, in our minds, to the self-destruction of Solomon, let us pause long enough to see him in his early reign. His wish came true, God gave him wisdom.

Application

I want to draw a few observations from these passages before we wrap up our discussion. What can we learn from these first events in Solomon's reign?

Wisdom comes only to those who first admit that they need it

1. Wisdom comes only to those who first admit that they need it!

Read the book of Proverbs again and gain an awareness of how available wisdom is to anyone who will admit that they need it.

Wisdom is revealed only through those who recognize that God gives it

2. Wisdom is revealed only through those who recognize that God gives it.

Nearly ten times in the conversation between Solomon and God, the words, "asked for," are written. God is the giver of wisdom, mankind is the recipient.

Wisdom is available only to those who are grateful when God provides it

3. Wisdom is available only to those who are grateful when God provides it.

Notice verse 15 of I Kings, chapter 3.

Then Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and made peace

offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

That is the Old Testament way of saying to God, “Thank you.”

How many of us are quick to say, “Oh Lord, help me!”

How slow are we, however, when fresh with success, to say, “O Lord, thank you.”

This young king, whose reputation would reach nearly around the world, began his career with his eyes, not on the gifts, but on the Giver, and his heart was open to hear.

It was late at the night, when Britain’s Lord Chamberlain woke up an eighteen year old girl. The year was 1837. When she awakened from her sleep,

in her bedroom deep inside Buckingham Palace’s halls, Lord Chamberlain told that sleepy teenage girl that her uncle had died and that she was now the Queen of Great Britain. Then, he opened his Bible to I Kings, chapter 3, and read to that young lady, who would soon be crowned Queen Victoria, from this very passage!

This is a good place to stop and ask ourselves, “What are we trusting in? Where are we looking? What are we asking God for? Do we have hearing hearts tuned into the wisdom of God?”

If God were to come to you and say, “Make a wish . . . any wish.”

Would you wish for wisdom?!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/4/1995 by Stephen Davey.

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