



SOLOMON: A Man of Wisdom



Solomon's Early Life

One cannot study the wisdom literature of Scripture without first meeting the man whom God chose to share that wisdom. Solomon (Solomon, meaning *peace*, was the name given by David and Bathsheba. God also named him Jedidiah,

meaning *beloved by the Lord*. See 2 Samuel 12:24,) was not raised like other Hebrew children in 990 B.C. He grew up in the royal palace of his father, King David. Living among David's many wives, not to mention no fewer than nineteen brothers and half-brothers, must have been a challenge (See 1 Chronicles 3:1-9). Solomon's mother was Bathsheba, the former wife of Uriah the Hittite whom David had killed in battle. After the death of the child born from David's adulterous affair, Solomon was born. (See 2 Samuel 12:24.) He was the second of five sons born to Bathsheba. Having several older half-brothers, it was unlikely Solomon would ever be considered an heir to the throne. That blessing belonged to David's first-born son Amnon. Amnon however committed the shameful sin of raping his half-sister Tamar, sister of Absalom. After carefully plotting revenge for this act, Absalom eventually found a way to murder Amnon for his wicked deed. Not long after, Absalom, himself a possible heir to the throne, was killed on the battlefield while trying to usurp his father's throne. Thus the words of the prophet Nathan regarding David's family were fulfilled, "*Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you*" (2 Samuel 12:11).

God had his own plan for David's successor. "*Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father*" (1

Chronicles 28:6). David followed God's direction as we read in 1 Chronicles 28:5ff, "*Of all my sons—and the LORD has given me many—he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel*".

Yet although Solomon was chosen to be king, Adonijah, legally next in line to the throne, sought the crown for himself. "*Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, 'I will be king'*" (1 Kings 1:5). When Bathsheba heard this, she rushed in to speak with David and remind him that Solomon was the Lord's choice. On his deathbed, David said to Bathsheba, "*Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place*" (1 Kings 1:30).

We can only speculate what type of parents David and Bathsheba were. As a shepherd boy, David lived close to nature and loved to muse about animals, plants and life itself. No doubt as a young man he even did much writing and composing. We can sense that same love of nature and life reflected in many of Solomon's proverbs.

Solomon's request for wisdom reflects his upbringing in the house of David. Solomon gives his father a fitting tribute in Proverbs 4:3-9:

"For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother. Then he taught me, and he said to me, 'Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get

understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown.”

David’s words to Solomon were, *“I am about to go the way of all the earth, so be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.’”* (1 Kings 2:1-4).

Discuss: Can you point out any weaknesses of David as a parent?

Solomon’s Wisdom

“The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart” (1 Kings 10:24). Living in the house of David, a wise and insightful king, it is apparent that Solomon took note of the responsibilities and judgments necessary to be the supreme ruler of a nation. At the young age of perhaps 20 years old, the royal crown was passed down to Solomon. Realizing Solomon’s youthfulness, David reflected some concern about Solomon. *“Then King David said to the whole assembly: ‘My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great’”* (1 Chronicles 28:6). Just prior to his death, David prayed for his son, *“Give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, requirements and decrees . . .”* (1 Chronicles 29:19).

2 Chronicles begins with the statement that God was with Solomon and made him exceedingly great. Shortly after his coronation, God came to Solomon in a dream and said to him, *“Ask for whatever you want me to give you”* (2 Chronicles 1:7). Solomon’s answer was insightful, and it pleased the Lord: *“Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?”* (2 Chronicles 1:10). God responded: *“Since this is your heart’s desire*

and you have not asked for wealth, riches and honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have” (2 Chronicles 1:11,12). Such wisdom was soon put to practice as we read the account of the two prostitutes who came to Solomon for a judgment as to the rightful mother of a child. (See 1 Kings 3:16-28). After this ruling, the people were amazed with the king’s wisdom, knowing it was God who had given him special insight.

The author of 1 Kings continues to describe the exceptional wisdom that was given to Solomon: *“God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom”* (1 Kings 4:29-34). One of these world travelers who had heard of Solomon’s fame was the Queen of Sheba. *“She came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions . . . she came and talked with him about all she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for him to explain to her”* (2 Chronicles 9:1,2).

Discuss: What does the naming of wise men in I Chronicles 9:1,2 say about the importance placed on wisdom in Solomon’s day? Do you believe that Solomon truly was the wisest man to ever live?

Solomon's Wealth

Not only was Solomon blessed with great wisdom, but the Lord also provided a second blessing of wealth and riches. Solomon's empire grew in wealth through trading (see 1 Kings 9:26-28), gifts (see 1 Kings 10:25), tribute money (see 1 Kings 4:21), and heavy taxation (1 Kings 12:3,4).

Every year Solomon received an estimated 25 tons of gold, valued today at over a billion dollars. Read 1 Kings 10:14-29 to explore the depth of Solomon's riches. Yet Solomon wrote about the importance of such wealth in his book of Proverbs: *"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold"* (Proverbs 3:13,14), and again in Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless."*

Solomon's Achievements

"You will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign" (1 Chronicles 22:9). Another blessing the Lord gave to Solomon was that unlike the days of his warrior father David (see 1 Chronicles 22:8), Solomon's reign would be a time of peace. That blessing provided Solomon sufficient time to build a suitable house for the Lord. Although David was instrumental in purchasing the land, readying the detailed plans, and preparing construction materials, it was Solomon who was entrusted with the construction. God told David, *"Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father"* (1 Chronicles 28:6).

Solomon's task was enormous. Beginning the foundation work in his fourth year as king, the building took seven years for completion. The workforce included 150,000 laborers supervised by 3,600 Israelites. Seven chapters in the Bible are devoted to the building of the temple (1 Kings 5-7; 2 Chronicles 2-5) and another three chapters cover its dedication. But the temple was only the beginning of

Solomon's projects. After the temple was finished, the next thirteen years were spent building Solomon's own palace. (Read 1 Kings 7:1-8; 10:18-22.) In addition to that, he built numerous stables for his horses (4,000 stalls for his horses and 12,000 horsemen), plus ships, and chariots. During Solomon's kingship, the Lord abundantly showered blessings on his people.

Solomon's Personal Life

"Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places" (1 Kings 3:3). Solomon's reign as king underwent several transformations. There is no doubt that he had a true love for the Lord and respect for his judgments. The heartfelt words of his temple dedication prayer certainly reflect this love. (See 1 Kings 8:22-61.)

Yet in choosing a king, the Lord had given the Israelites a very specific warning. The king *"must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray"* (Deuteronomy 17:17). Very early in his reign, *"Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem"* (1 Kings 3:1). Knowing that his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter displeased the Lord, Solomon moved her away from Jerusalem. *"Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, 'My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the LORD has entered are holy'"* (2 Chronicles 8:11).

Although the marriage to Pharaoh's daughter was likely for political purposes, it opened the door to the demons of Solomon's weakness: heathen wives. *"King Solomon loved many foreign women (princesses) besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred*

wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 11:1-6).

Not only did Solomon tolerate false religions, he even encouraged them and participated in them. This was in direct defiance to God’s command in 1 Kings 9:6,7: “If you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name.” Sadly, with all of the wisdom Solomon had, he failed to use it wisely.

God’s visit to Solomon granted him one other blessing if he would lead a godly life. “If you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you long life” (1 Kings 3:14). Scripture tells us that Solomon ruled for forty years and was buried in the city of David. Solomon’s son Rehoboam succeeded him as king. It is ironic that as intent as Solomon’s proverbs were regarding parents raising their children in the fear of the Lord, Solomon’s son ruled as a fool and was responsible for the end of the united kingdom that David and Solomon had maintained. If Solomon became king at age 20 and died at age 60, we are lead to believe that long life was never realized because of Solomon’s tragic apostasy.

Discuss: Do you think Solomon’s wealth and prestige may have influenced his need for women? What does the Bible say about a camel and the eye of a needle?

Did Solomon Die a Believer?

This brings us to Solomon’s enigma. While we profess that all of the books of the Bible were divinely inspired and written by God’s people, what

can we say about the man whose name is associated with Song of Solomon, most of Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, especially since they seem to have been written at various stages of his life? (Solomon is the only king whose books are included in our Bible. Song of Solomon was likely written when Solomon was a young man, Proverbs during his middle age years, and Ecclesiastes was penned toward the end of his life.)

There has been endless speculation about Solomon’s faith in light of his backsliding ways and his worldly infatuation for foreign gods and wives. Henry W. Morris, author of **The Remarkable Wisdom of Solomon**, presents some insight into a question that is left unanswered in Scripture.

First, Jesus himself twice referred to Solomon, each time in a very respectable way. (Read Matthew 6:28,29; Matthew 12:42.) Here Jesus referred to Solomon’s glory and wisdom, but his apostasy is not mentioned.

Second, the account of Solomon is recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles, only Kings mentions his many wives. Chronicles makes no comment on his many wives, only his marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter. This could raise the question if Solomon repented of his ways prior to his death? If he repented of his sinfulness, he would not have been the only king to do so. Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, was one of the most wicked kings ever to rule on the throne of Judah, yet Scripture says that in his later years he repented of his wrongdoing.

Third, it is also noteworthy that although Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines, neither Kings nor Chronicles mentions any sons or daughters with the exception of one son, Rehoboam, who would later succeed him, and two daughters, Basemath and Tephath. Could it be that his wives were strictly for political show and prestige? If Solomon had marital relations with that many women, one would imagine that Jerusalem was filled with his offspring.

Lastly, in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Solomon emphasizes the point that marriage is to be lived with only one partner. “May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Proverbs 5:18). “Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this

meaningless life that God has given you under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

The question will never be answered this side of heaven. Yet we believe that the books of Solomon are divinely inspired, and God truly has a purpose for them in our lives.

The following lessons dig deeper into the wisdom literature that Solomon and others provide for us. Here we will begin to unlock the mysteries of God and life as we set out to discover *Wisdom: A Gift to God’s People*.

Discuss: Solomon was wealthy and wise. What does Jeremiah 9:23,24 say about such blessings?