

Women's Bible Study ~ Spring 2012

Kings and Kingdoms: God's Sovereign Hand in Israel's

History

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Solomon the Wise King: Part I ~ I Kings 3-5

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Good morning and welcome to our Women's Bible Study Series on Kings and Kingdoms. I have looked forward to this series since we announced it. Yes, partly because it is steeped in rich history, but mainly because it contains the stories of real people.

I have been giving thought lately to real people and lives well lived. On December 29th, 2011, at 2:00 a.m. our phone rang. It's rarely a good sign when your phone rings in the wee hours of the morning. It was my sister telling me that my grandmother at the age of 102 had died. I know this going to sound ridiculous, but it was a bit of a surprise.

The week had been similar to any other week, except of course it was Christmas. My grandmother had had a lovely time celebrating with her family in Kentucky and she and I had talked on the phone that day. A few days later my grandmother wasn't feeling well and was taken to the hospital. This was not unusual since various aches and pains were somewhat common and were usually dealt with swiftly. After examination at the hospital she was treated with antibiotics and a few hours later diagnosed with pneumonia, this too had happened before. She then settled in for the night, although my sister said she told stories about her childhood for hours. After her storytelling stent she fell asleep but soon after awakened, coughed a few times and then she was simply gone. The end of a very long life.

My brother and sister asked me to be in charge of the funeral. How do you summarize more than a century of relationships and service to others? We eventually decided on five speakers. The first was her brother, the sole survivor of 14 children. He was the youngest and spoke in terms only a little brother could.

The second speaker was my uncle, my father's brother, who reminisced of times he worked on my grandparents' farm during his summers home from college. He talked of her gift of hospitality and generosity.

The third speaker was a man about my age that she had placed for adoption as an infant. He spoke of how she had changed his life. He was the owner of the local Burger King where my grandmother often came to eat, he often joined her in the dining room.

The fourth speaker was her secretary. My grandmother had worked for 27 years as a teacher and then retired and went on to work another 20 years as a social worker. This woman described my grandmother as a woman of integrity, courage, and great compassion for children in trouble. The final speaker was me measuring her life as I knew it to the life of the woman described in Proverbs 31.

As a result, I have been reflecting on what comprises a person's life, the high points and the low points and the difficult process of summarizing a life in a few pages. That actually will be our task this

morning/evening. My father was often disturbed when he attended funerals of what he called ordinary folks, who in death had become far more than they were in life.

The Bible strikingly does not do this, even for its most notable men and women. In the Bible we get a very accurate assessment of people, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

This particular series will give us a front row seat to a very accurate assessment of the lives of those who served as kings of the nation of Israel.

Our topic this morning/evening is one of the few times in my experience with Women's Bible Study that we have taken a single topic or person and divided it across two lectures. This week we will be studying Solomon the Wise King and in two weeks Solomon the Unwise King. It is a profound exercise to honestly confront that one of the greatest Kings of Israel, just like his father David, had profound areas of sin. Isn't that a lot like us we have both the capacity for wisdom and foolishness.

Context

David's Wives

Our Scripture Passage for this lecture is 1 Kings chapters 3-5. We are going to read some excerpts from those chapters in a few minutes, but first I want to give you some historical context. I know you of course are shocked at that revelation.

Last week we learned about Israel's second king, David. Solomon was David's Son, but his birth and ascension to the throne had much background baggage. By the time he was around 30 years old, David had at least six wives.¹ He acquired them in various ways, but let's read about one of the saddest acquisitions in 2 Samuel 11:1-5.

1In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

2One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, 3and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. 5The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

King David was not where he was supposed to be. He was supposed to be in the battlefield with his troops, but instead he was at the Palace without enough to do. He spots a lovely young woman from his rooftop and desires her, even though he clearly is informed that she is another man's wife. He sleeps with her and a child is conceived.

You probably are well acquainted with the sad facts. David has her husband murdered, he marries the woman, she gives birth to a child, and perhaps the understatement of the whole passage, ***"But the thing David had done displeased the LORD"***,² The infant dies and the parents, David and Bathsheba mourn. I wonder if they felt that the displeasure of the LORD would rest on them forever.

¹ 2Samuel 5:4, 2 Samuel 3:2-5.

² 2Samuel 11:27.

The Birth of Solomon

But then we read, 2 Samuel 12:24-25, ***24Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; 25and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.***

Jedidiah means Beloved of the Lord. The Nelson Study Bible footnote puts it this way, “The divinely sanctioned name, spoken by the prophet of the Lord, was the final symbol of God’s forgiveness in the lives of David and Bathsheba”.³

These are the circumstances of Solomon’s Birth. As time goes by there are all kinds of dramatic events in his family including several attempts by David’s other sons to gain the throne and rule Israel, but God has his hand of blessing on this child. In fact, Solomon will be David’s successor to the throne even though he is nowhere near one of the oldest sons, and he will be an ancestor in the line of the Messiah.

Scripture Passage

The Prologue

Let’s turn our attention to the scripture passage for today. If you have your Bibles please turn to 1 Kings, Chapter 3. The first section I have titled the prologue because it gives us additional background for our study. 1 Kings 3:1-3:

1Solomon 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. 2The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. 3Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

3 Facts:

Fact #1

There are three facts that are critical for us to understand in these verses. Fact #1, Solomon married a foreign wife. There is no way to gloss over this fact. She is an Egyptian and it appears that the marriage was part of a political alliance. The Israelites were told in multiple places not to do this. Listen to these excerpts from Deuteronomy 7:1-4: ***1When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations . . . larger and stronger than you— 2and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. 3Do not intermarry with them. . . . 4for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. . .***

Fact #2

Fact #2, the people of Israel and Solomon were sacrificing at the high places. So what were these high places and why were they a problem? High places were elevated sites of worship located on a hill or on

³ Nelson Study Bible page 527.

an artificial platform in a temple.⁴ For example, look at Numbers 22:41, this is the story of Balak and Balaam (he was the one with a talking donkey). ***41So it was, the next day, that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, that from there he might observe the extent of the people. (NKJV)***

The problem with these high places is that they had historically been used for pagan worship. God had warned Israel from the beginning about the danger of these places.

Deuteronomy 12:1-4 says, ***1These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land. 2Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. 3Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. 4You must not worship the LORD your God in their way.***

So given these instructions, why was Solomon at the High Place? It was probably because the Israelites had been instructed to offer sacrifices at the tabernacle and right now the tabernacle was currently located at a high place at Gibeon. A permanent structure had not yet been built. It is possible that this is why David was so concerned about getting the temple built. These high places will be an issue in nearly every narrative of the kings and they were continually a thorn in the side of the nation.

Fact #3

Fact #3, Solomon loved the LORD. This is not my assessment or interpretation, the text clearly says it. ***3Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, . . .***

These three facts all have application for our lives centuries later. First, we are not to be yoked to unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, ***14Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*** Second, we are not to mingle our religion with other religions by adopting some of their elements of worship. We are a distinct people. Third, we are to love the LORD and walk according to his instructions.

The Request

Let's look now at the request. 1 Kings 3:4-15: ***4The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."***

6Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

7"Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 8Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.

⁴ Nelson Study Bible page 465.

9So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

10The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, 12I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

13Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. 14And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." 15Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.

Additional Facts:

Fact #4

Fact #4 Solomon Came to Worship. He did not think that worship was beneath him even though he was surrounded by pomp and circumstance, and great riches. He came to worship even though there was as yet no temple, but a humble tabernacle that was centuries old.

We are also to come to worship. Worship is something we never outgrow by age, status, or position. We are to come to worship even when things aren't perfect. We are to come when the building isn't yet built, the location isn't quite right, and the people are a bit fragmented. We come to worship to meet God and to seek His counsel.

Fact #5

Fact #5, Solomon was Humble. It must be an incredible thing to be the ruler of a nation. I always find Monarchs especially interesting. I find even young royalty like Prince William to be intriguing. Solomon was even younger than Prince William or the Duke of Cambridge as he is now called. The Duke is 29 and King Solomon was less than 20 years old when he became King. He grew up in a royal family surrounded by riches and protocol. Yet, he was humble. We see this in how he talked to God. He says, ***"I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties"***. Solomon is aware of the great responsibility with which he has been given and he desires to govern well, but realizes he does not have the expertise to carry out his responsibilities.

Fact #6

Fact #6 Solomon chooses well. He asks for wisdom. Don't you just marvel at his choice. Apparently it is an expected thing that monarchs ask for long life, riches and victory over their enemies, but it is rare to ask for a wise and discerning heart to govern. Solomon's request tells us a lot about his heart and his desire to obey.

We can make wise requests as well. Wisdom is not a gift that is finite. God did not exhaust the supply by giving an abundance to Solomon. James 1:5,6 says, ***5If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.***

We can have wisdom too, but we must ask. We have to ask in faith, not simply casting a careless request to the wind, but approaching God with an understanding of who he is and the power at his disposal.

God gives wisdom generously. When is the last time you asked for wisdom? When is the last time in your prayers that you set aside your list of requests and said, “I don’t know how to carry out my duties, grant me a wise and discerning heart to lead the people you have given me”? We aren’t Kings or Queens, but we all have spheres of influence. We need to govern in those spheres wisely. We can’t do that without God’s provision.

Before we leave this portion of the passage, I wonder did you catch the fact that Solomon was asleep during this encounter? One commentator suggested that even Solomon’s wise request was a gift of Grace because God guided him in his sleep to make a wise request. We too are recipients of Grace as God grants us wisdom, not as an earned reward, but as a gift to be had for the asking.

The Exercise of Wisdom

Now, let’s look briefly at the exercise of Solomon’s wisdom. 1 Kings 3:16-27:

16Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. 17One of them said, “Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. 18The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. 19“During the night this woman’s son died because she lay on him. 20So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. 21The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t the son I had borne.”

22The other woman said, “No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.” But the first one insisted, “No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.” And so they argued before the king. 23The king said, “This one says, ‘My son is alive and your son is dead,’ while that one says, ‘No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.’”

Fact #7

Let’s interrupt the narrative briefly with Fact #7, Solomon is available to administer justice to the unholy and the undeserving. Have you thought about the fact that it is somewhat unusual for the King of a Nation to be settling disputes among two prostitutes? They seem out of place standing before the King with this kind of argument.

24Then the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought a sword for the king. 25He then gave an order: “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.” 26The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!” But the other said, “Neither I nor you shall have

him. Cut him in two!” ²⁷Then the king gave his ruling: “Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.”

²⁸When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

The Blessing

Fact #8

Most of us learned this story as children, but it is not really a child’s story. It has major adult themes in it. But the overarching theme is Fact #8, Solomon is a blessing to his country. Through him the people see that he has been given a gift of Wisdom from God. This has tremendous implications for them as a country and as a people.

1 Kings 4:20-34: ²⁰The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. ²¹And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon’s subjects all his life.

²²Solomon’s daily provisions were thirty cors of the finest flour and sixty cors of meal, ²³ ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. ²⁴For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphshah to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. ²⁵During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree. ²⁶Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses. ²⁷The district governors, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king’s table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. ²⁸They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses.

²⁹God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹He 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. ³²He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. ³³He 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. ³⁴From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon was a blessing not only to his own country but to the world. His wisdom, given as a gift by God, influenced many other countries, for the glory of God.

We too, must remember whether we are citizens of this country or another, the relationship between our leaders and God has implications. In fact, God had clearly explained this to Solomon when he appeared to him a second time after the Temple had been built and dedicated. 1 King 9: **³The LORD said to him: “I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. ⁴As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, ⁵I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said,**

'You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.' 6“But 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, 7then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

So we have a snapshot of the high points of the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon the Wise King. In the end as we remember those most precious to our faith personally and historically it should give us comfort to see them realistically because it reminds us of the wisdom of God's Grace. Solomon's Wisdom wasn't just one dose to carry him throughout his life, but I think a reminder that he needed to continually seek the face of God to know how to apply wisdom in every area of his life. We will see how he did with that challenge in two weeks.

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