



THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

INTO THE WORD

LESSON 22

- WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS LESSON:
 - The reign of Solomon (c. 970-931 BC)
 - The wisdom of Solomon
 - The "Golden Age" of Israel
 - The Great Building Projects: Solomon builds the temple
 - Solomon forgets his promises and disaster ensues
- BIBLICAL THEMES:
 - God honors humility and rejects the proud.
- SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES:
 - 1 Kings 3-11
- FOR FURTHER STUDY:
 - "The Bible and Archaeology: King Solomon's Reign - Israel's Golden Years"
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Introduction:

Solomon, the son of David, loved the Lord. He was well known for his great wisdom and wealth, and for his many wives who numbered close to one thousand. His great reputation warranted the famous visit from the Queen of Sheba¹. Many scholars attribute the majority of the book of Proverbs, the book of Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon to King Solomon. These books, written in the eastern "wisdom literature" tradition, have a lasting legacy in western civilization. Twentieth-century American novelist, Thomas Wolfe writes, "Of all I have ever seen or learned, that book seems to me the noblest, the wisest, and the most powerful expression of man's life upon this earth — and also the highest flower of poetry, eloquence, and truth. I am not given to dogmatic judgments in the matter of literary creation, but if I had to make one I could say that Ecclesiastes is the greatest single piece of writing I have ever known, and the wisdom expressed in it the most lasting and profound." (Eric S. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*, 2007).

As Solomon grew older, his love and respect for the Lord diminished. Perhaps pride in his own accomplishments, coupled with the many pagan wives he took into his household, turned his heart from the one true God. Lost in idolatry, Solomon began to worship other gods. The beginning of Solomon's reign as king, portrayed a man full of humility and desire to please God. He built a great kingdom, but after his death the kingdom began to implode, ending in division and disaster. Solomon's son and successor, Rehoboam, threatened to lay a heavier tax burden on the people than Solomon had. The people demanded reforms but Rehoboam took the counsel of his younger advisors, rather than that of the older and more experienced men. The result was a revolt and a kingdom divided into North and South, Israel and Judah (I Kings 12). Solomon's idolatry had opened the door for destruction, demonstrating that a kingdom without God at its center, is no kingdom at all.

¹ Modern archaeological studies support the view that the biblical kingdom of Sheba was the ancient Semitic civilization of Saba in Southern Arabia, in Yemen, between 1200 BC until 275 AD with its capital in Marib. Their civilization stretched as far as Aqaba with small colonies to protect the trade routes, these colonies included Yathrib and the central Arabian kingdom of Kindah, and northern Ethiopia.



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- How would you define “biblical wisdom”?
(Proverbs 1:2, 5; 2:2,6; 3:4-5, 13; 4:5-7; Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 1:9, James 1:5; Ecclesiastes 10:10)

- What daily practices can we follow to live wisely?

Into the Word:

1. Solomon Entreats the Lord for Wisdom

After taking the office of king, Solomon went to Gibeon and offered one thousand burnt offerings on the altar (1 Kings 3:3-4). After this physical representation of his dedication to the Lord at Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and spoke to him:

- 1 Kings 3:5 (NLT)
⁵That night the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!”

What a question! All of God's riches were at Solomon's disposal. Solomon's response to this remarkable question reveals a pure heart and a great sense of maturity:

- 1 Kings 3:6-9 (NLT)
⁶Solomon replied, “You showed great and faithful love to your servant my father, David, because he was honest and true and faithful to you. And you have continued to show this great and faithful love to him today by giving him a son to sit on his throne. ⁷“Now, O Lord my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around. ⁸And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous they cannot be counted! ⁹Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?”



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- What do you notice about the tone of Solomon's response?

- What does his response reveal about Solomon's heart at this stage in his kingship?

Solomon's request reflects his unselfish desire to be a godly leader like father, David. As a result of his unselfish request, God made Solomon the wisest king who ever lived:

- 1 Kings 3:10-15 (NLT)
¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. ¹¹ So God replied, "Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies— ¹² I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! ¹³ And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! ¹⁴ And if you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a long life." ¹⁵ Then Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the Lord's Covenant, where he sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then he invited all his officials to a great banquet.



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- Matthew 6:33 states: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matthew 6:33, NLT). In which ways does God's response to Solomon's request demonstrate the truth of this scripture?

- Is God's response conditional? How so?

In his early years as king, Solomon desired an understanding heart so that he could discern between good and evil. Those things which he did not ask for - long life, riches, and power over his enemies - God then generously gave to Solomon. The Word of the Lord is true. Seek His Kingdom first!

2. Solomon Judges Wisely

One of the most famous examples of Solomon's wisdom is found in the below portion of scripture. Two prostitutes come before the king seeking justice; both claiming to be the mother of the same baby:

- 1 Kings 3:16-28

¹⁶Some time later two prostitutes came to the king to have an argument settled. ¹⁷"Please, my lord," one of them began, "this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a baby while she was with me in the house. ¹⁸Three days later this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there were only two of us in the house. ¹⁹"But her baby died during the night when she rolled over on it. ²⁰Then she got up in the night and took my son from beside me while I was asleep. She laid her dead child in my arms and took mine to sleep beside her. ²¹And in the morning when I tried to nurse my son, he was dead! But when I looked more closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't my son at all." ²²Then the other woman interrupted, "It certainly was your son, and the living child is mine." "No," the first woman said, "the living child is mine, and the dead one is yours." And so they argued back and forth before the king. ²³Then the king said, "Let's get the facts straight. Both of you claim the living child is yours, and each says that the dead one belongs to the other. ²⁴All right, bring me a sword." So a sword was brought to the king. ²⁵Then he said, "Cut the living child in two, and give half to one woman and half to the other!" ²⁶Then the woman who was the real mother of the living child, and who loved him very much, cried out, "Oh no, my lord! Give her the child—please do not kill him!" But the other woman said, "All right, he will be neither yours nor mine; divide him between us!" ²⁷Then the king said, "Do not kill the child, but give him to the woman who wants him to live, for she is his mother!" ²⁸When all Israel heard the king's decision, the people were in awe of the king, for they saw the wisdom God had given him for rendering justice.



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- Explain the wisdom of this episode.

- How does this story represent God's wisdom rather than man's wisdom?

3. Solomon Builds the Temple

Perhaps Solomon's greatest accomplishment was the temple he built at Jerusalem. Solomon believed that the Lord allowed him to rule in peace so that he might build the temple (1 Kings 5:4). Solomon used the time of peace wisely and actively engaged a great number of his people in the noble endeavor of building. The whole nation of Israel were invested in the project. The temple would form the central identity of God's people. It was their focus and their passion.

Solomon exercised diplomatic wisdom in the way that he worked with surrounding kingdoms in order to obtain the raw materials needed for the construction of the temple. Solomon made an agreement with Hiram, the King of Tyre, to employ both the servants of Israel and the servants of King Hiram in the chopping down of the cedar trees of Lebanon, in the mining of the costly stone to be used for the foundation of the temple, and in the making of all of its furnishings.

- 1 Kings 6 (NLT)

¹It was in midspring, in the month of Ziv, during the fourth year of Solomon's reign, that he began to construct the Temple of the LORD. This was 480 years after the people of Israel were rescued from their slavery in the land of Egypt. ²The Temple that King Solomon built for the LORD was 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. ³The entry room at the front of the Temple was 30 feet wide, running across the entire width of the Temple. It projected outward 15 feet from the front of the Temple. ⁴Solomon also made narrow recessed windows throughout the Temple. ⁵He built a complex of rooms against the outer walls of the Temple, all the way around the sides and rear of the building. ⁶The complex was three stories high, the bottom floor being 7 1/2 feet wide, the second floor 9 feet wide, and the top floor 10 1/2 feet wide. The rooms were connected to the walls of the Temple by beams resting on ledges built out from the wall. So the beams were not inserted into the walls themselves. ⁷The stones used in the construction of the Temple were finished at the quarry, so there was no sound of hammer, ax, or any other iron tool at the building site. ⁸The entrance to the bottom floor was on the south side of the Temple. There were winding stairs going up to the second floor, and another flight of stairs between the second and third floors. ⁹After completing the Temple structure, Solomon put in a ceiling made of cedar beams and planks. ¹⁰As already stated, he built a complex of rooms along the sides of the building, attached to the Temple walls by cedar timbers. Each story of the complex was 7 1/2 feet high. ¹¹Then the LORD gave this message to Solomon: ¹²"Concerning this Temple you are building, if you keep all my decrees and regulations and obey all my commands, I will fulfill through you the promise I made to your father, David. ¹³I will live among the Israelites and will never abandon my people Israel."

The Temple's Interior

¹⁴ So Solomon finished building the Temple. ¹⁵ The entire inside, from floor to ceiling, was paneled with wood. He paneled the walls and ceilings with cedar, and he used planks of cypress for the floors. ¹⁶ He partitioned off an inner sanctuary—the Most Holy Place—at the far end of the Temple. It was 30 feet deep and was paneled with cedar from floor to ceiling. ¹⁷ The main room of the Temple, outside the Most Holy Place, was 60 feet long. ¹⁸ Cedar paneling completely covered the stone walls throughout the Temple, and the paneling was decorated with carvings of gourds and open flowers. ¹⁹ He prepared the inner sanctuary at the far end of the Temple, where the Ark of the LORD's Covenant would be placed. ²⁰ This inner sanctuary was 30 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 30 feet high. He overlaid the inside with solid gold. He also overlaid the altar made of cedar. ²¹ Then Solomon overlaid the rest of the Temple's interior with solid gold, and he made gold chains to protect the entrance to the Most Holy Place. ²² So he finished overlaying the entire Temple with gold, including the altar that belonged to the Most Holy Place. ²³ He made two cherubim of wild olive wood, each 15 feet tall, and placed them in the inner sanctuary. ²⁴ The wingspan of each of the cherubim was 15 feet, each wing being 7 1/2 feet long. ²⁵ The two cherubim were identical in shape and size; ²⁶ each was 15 feet tall. ²⁷ He placed them side by side in the inner sanctuary of the Temple. Their outspread wings reached from wall to wall, while their inner wings touched at the center of the room. ²⁸ He overlaid the two cherubim with gold. ²⁹ He decorated all the walls of the inner sanctuary and the main room with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. ³⁰ He overlaid the floor in both rooms with gold. ³¹ For the entrance to the inner sanctuary, he made double doors of wild olive wood with five-sided doorposts. ³² These double doors were decorated with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. The doors, including the decorations of cherubim and palm trees, were overlaid with gold. ³³ Then he made four-sided doorposts of wild olive wood for the entrance to the Temple. ³⁴ There were two folding doors of cypress wood, and each door was hinged to fold back upon itself. ³⁵ These doors were decorated with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers—all overlaid evenly with gold. ³⁶ The walls of the inner courtyard were built so that there was one layer of cedar beams between every three layers of finished stone. ³⁷ The foundation of the LORD's Temple was laid in midspring, in the month of Ziv, during the fourth year of Solomon's reign. ³⁸ The entire building was completed in every detail by midautumn, in the month of Bul, during the eleventh year of his reign. So it took seven years to build the Temple.

When the temple was finally completed, King Solomon offered earnest and eloquent prayers to the God of his fathers, dedicating the temple to the Lord's use and interceding on behalf of the people. Solomon prayed that the Lord might judge His people righteously, show them mercy as they turned towards and followed Him, and entreated God to forgive the sins of the people (1 Kings 8). Solomon demonstrated tremendous godly leadership, and the heart of a shepherd as he stood before and blessed the assembly of Israel at the temple's dedication. At the conclusion of his prayers, Solomon and all Israel with him, offered sacrifices, followed by a time great feasting and rejoicing (I Kings 8:65-66). In response, God met with Solomon a second time at Gibeon and made a covenant with him, promising that if Solomon continued to walk with the Lord and keep his laws and ordinances, He would establish his seed upon the throne of Israel forever (I Kings 9: 1-9).



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- Why do you think Solomon exercised wisdom in making the construction of the temple the focus for the nation of Israel?
- What is the promise the Lord makes to Solomon in verses 1 Kings 8:11-13 and further explained in I Kings 9: 1-9. What conditions are attached to this promise?
- How significant is the New Testament scripture 1 Corinthians 6:19 in the context of the central importance of the temple to the nation of Israel under Solomon?

4. Solomon Grows in Pride and Vanity

Solomon's reign appeared to be a Golden Age for Israel: it was a time of great prosperity and growth. Solomon continued with his great building projects, spending 14 years on the construction of the palatial buildings and constructing a fleet of ships. His renown and wealth was so great that the Queen of Sheba came to visit him to see if the reports of his great wealth and wisdom were in fact true.

However, as Solomon established himself as king, he became a thorough despot, ultimately turning his heart from the God who had established his wisdom and wealth. All political power was taken out of the hands of the tribal sheiks and placed in the hands of officers who were simply puppets of Solomon. The resources of the nation were expended not on works of public utility, but on the personal aggrandizement of the monarch. He became more and more

interested in his own desires and welfare, rather than that of the people he had been commissioned to serve and lead (1 Kings 10: 1-29).

Solomon began to take many foreign women as wives. Lost in his pride and carnality, Solomon expressly defied God by marrying women from the nations that God had explicitly instructed His people to remain separate. Eventually he fell deeply into the sin of idolatry. He began to build altars to other gods, bringing God's anger upon himself:

○ 1 Kings 11:6-13 (NLT)

⁶In this way, Solomon did what was evil in the LORD's sight; he refused to follow the LORD completely, as his father, David, had done. ⁷On the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem,^[a] he even built a pagan shrine for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and another for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁸Solomon built such shrines for all his foreign wives to use for burning incense and sacrificing to their gods. ⁹The LORD was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ¹⁰He had warned Solomon specifically about worshiping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the LORD's command. ¹¹So now the LORD said to him, "Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my decrees, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. ¹²But for the sake of your father, David, I will not do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son. ¹³And even so, I will not take away the entire kingdom; I will let him be king of one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, my chosen city."



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- Why do you think Solomon turned away from the Lord?

- How can we avoid the sin of pride?

- Why do you think the Lord was so angry with Solomon?

- Can you see mercy in God's judgments?

Conclusion:

The experiment with the opulence and power of the great eastern kingdoms ended in disaster for Israel. King Solomon created the wealthiest and most powerful central government the Hebrews would ever see, but he did so at an impossibly high cost. Land was given away to pay for his extravagances and people were sent into forced labor into Tyre in the north. Solomon's greed, pride and entanglement with the world eroded the sweet fellowship with God he had so beautifully expressed in the book of *Ecclesiastes*. Solomon deliberately chose to live "under the sun" instead of under God. With all his wisdom, he failed to realize that God will not be scorned. When Solomon died, between 926 and 922 BCE, the ten northern tribes refused to submit to his son, Rehoboam, and revolted. Ultimately, Solomon "reaped what he sowed" (Galatians 6:7).

From this point on, there would be two kingdoms of Hebrews: in the north - Israel, and in the south - Judah. The Israelites formed their capital in the city of Samaria, and the Judaeans kept their capital in Jerusalem. These kingdoms remained separate states for over two hundred years.

The history of the both kingdoms is a litany of ineffective, disobedient, and corrupt kings. When the Hebrews had first asked for a king, in the book of *Judges*, they were told that only God was their king. When they approached Samuel the Prophet, he told them the desire for a king was an act of disobedience and that they would pay dearly if they established a monarchy. The history told in the book of *Kings*, bears out Samuel's warning.

The Hebrew empire eventually collapses, Moab successfully revolts against Judah, and Ammon successfully secedes from Israel. Within a century of Solomon's death, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were left as tiny little states - no bigger than Connecticut. Located directly between the Mesopotamian kingdoms in the northeast and powerful Egypt in the southwest, the Hebrew Kingdoms were of the utmost commercial and military importance to all these warring powers. Being small was a liability.²

And yet, God still had a plan and a purpose for His people. Despite the exile and enslavement that lay in their future, the Hebrew prophets foretold of the one to come who would deliver Israel, and all who would believe in Him, once and for all:

- Malachi 3:1 (NLT)
"Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

² Hooker, Richard. *Ancient Jewish History: The Two Kingdoms*. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org