

THE STORY
STUDY 13
CHAPTER 13

The story ...

The story opens with King David on his deathbed. Bathsheba is ensuring that her son Solomon continues as king. David duly appointed Solomon as his successor. After that David died.

Solomon assumed the role of king, married the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh, and walked in the ways of his father. Although, ominously, we are told that he still offered sacrifices in the high places.

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon and invited Solomon to ask for anything he wanted. Recognizing the overwhelming size of the task, Solomon asked for wisdom. This pleased the Lord, who also gave him wealth and long life.

The incident of Solomon showing his wisdom comes next. It involved the two women with one baby, both claiming that the baby belonged to them.

Solomon's rule was characterized by wisdom, justice and fairness and his kingdom was prosperous and extensive. Solomon's name has become synonymous with wisdom. Scripture has recorded many of his wise sayings in the book of Proverbs.

Solomon built on the foundation laid by his father David. Because David had been involved primarily in military exploits, Solomon was able to consolidate the kingdom, build a temple. This he did using his wise diplomacy. It took seven years, and was built on the same pattern as the Tabernacle. Having completed the temple, Solomon brought all the furnishings which his father David had already acquired, and placed them in the temple. The final artefact was the Ark of the Covenant.

Solomon then prayed his prayer of the dedication for the temple. In his prayer Solomon acknowledged that no human structure was big enough to contain God. Solomon recognized that it was purely God's grace that God was to be associated with a place. After Solomon's prayer the Lord made it clear that he was pleased with the temple and that his presence would now be associated with the temple. Solomon offered sacrifices to the Lord at the dedication of the temple.

The Lord then appears to Solomon, and promises forgiveness and healing when the Israelites confess their sin. God also assured them should they forsake the ways of the Lord, and not repent, he would bring disaster on them.

The queen of Sheba visited Solomon to see if the reports about him and his wisdom were true. She found him to be as good as his reputation. The queen and Solomon then exchanged expensive gifts. We are then told about the incredible wealth of Solomon and what he did with his wealth.

Polygamy, common practice in those days, although never sanctioned by God, ultimately was instrumental in Solomon's fall. The influence of his foreign wives led Solomon to grow cold in his relationship with God. This led to God's judgement on Solomon.

1. Why was Solomon's request for wisdom and discernment so pleasing to the Lord?

2 scenarios: first one, a young politician gets into power. He has the world at his feet, AND he has the opportunity to influence positively for his country. He has people asking how they can help him. He tells them that he wants his political rivals silenced, he wants a flashy car with body guards, he wants a huge stipend, etc.

Second one: a young politician gets into power. He has the world at his feet, AND he has the opportunity to influence positively for his country. He has people asking how they can help him. Please stand by me, he asks. I need your wisdom and guidance to make the right decisions for the country.

Now, why would we approve of the second scenario? Because we see in that young politician a

real desire to serve not himself, but his country. And he is a person humble enough to realise that left to his own devices, he is not able to rise to meet the challenge.

Israel was God's nation. Until recently, God himself had been "king" and lead the nation. The nation had now wanted a king, and so the human king was reigning in the place of God. He was God's king. Of course God would want someone to rule in a way of which God approved. Would Solomon meet the challenge? This could have been a test for Solomon. Where did his priorities lie? With himself or with his calling to rule?

Solomon passed the test. He didn't ask for what your stereotypical young man recently given power would ask for. He asked for what was needed in order to rule in a God honouring way. And the Lord was pleased.

What could the implications of this be for you and me – who are not called to rule a nation?

"Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and these things will be added to you."

Solomon ruled in God's stead, so wanting God's wisdom was indirectly about God's kingdom, and he wanted wisdom before he wanted the other things. He did seek God's kingdom. And God gave him the other as well.

That is I believe a model – God's kingdom first. So we make sure that our devotions are not crowded out by the busyness of the day. We make sure that our giving to the Lord is not swallowed up in the demands of living.. We make sure – as a principle rather than a legalistic way – that our Sundays have time for worship.

What are some other examples of seeking first God's kingdom, and so please the Lord?

2. How is wisdom different from knowledge and intellect?

I think the simple answer is that wisdom is the correct application of knowledge and intellect.

This verse may help us:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way – Col 1:9,10

Paul makes it clear that we need more than knowledge – even knowledge of the will of God. This must be tempered with wisdom.

An example: **Jn 8:1-11**. The woman taken in adultery. Forget the motives behind those who brought the woman to Jesus. Knowledge and intellect alone would mean she should be stoned. Applying that with wisdom meant that Jesus achieved what pure knowledge and will could not have accomplished.

There is a danger. We might find ways of misapplying God's truth. Therefore the shared wisdom of wise people is an essential safeguard. The term "isolated Christian" is an oxymoron. The NT speaks of a plurality of elders, the Psalms are often addressed on a community worship setting. We are one – one in Christ, one body – on and on the idea of community is emphasised. We need each other if we are going to act with wisdom, rather than simply applying knowledge and intellect.

3. Why is it vital to become wise?

See above. I think the Pharisees as they are portrayed in scripture had knowledge and intellect and applied it in a legalistic manner. They were not wrong – it was scripture. But they applied it without wisdom.

4. What can you do to gain more wisdom?

Bad news for a generation used to instant messages, email, high speed internet, EFTs. Patience is the vital element for wisdom. We are not generally speaking instantly wise. It takes time. Which means we also need to be humble. Solomon was humble enough to realise that he needed supernatural help because on his own he did not have the wisdom. We can get supernatural

wisdom - **James 1:5** *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all ...* - and we must also pray for wisdom. But we will need to humble enough to ask those who have been on the Christian road longer than us for “wisdom” when facing issues. And then gradually, over time, we will become wise, and will find people asking us for our wisdom.

Getting wisdom means spending time with the Lord, reading his word. All we need for faith and practise, life and godliness, is to be found in scripture. We learn as we spend time reading and studying the bible. Then we gain experience, over time, in how to apply the knowledge and intellect with wisdom.

5. How did pride and lust contribute to Solomon’s downfall?

We read that when Solomon grew old his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord. We read that Solomon loved many foreign women.

Polygamy was never the Lord’s way. But God has always taken people where he finds them and works with them – even when the “people” are a nation – Israel. God took Israel where she was – polygamy and all – and gradually worked with them as a nation to bring them to where he wants us to be. Monogamous. But, while he accepted Solomon as a child of his time and culture, which included polygamy, God himself could not keep Solomon from the negative influences which are inevitably part of that lifestyle. And that we see in Solomon’s heart growing cold towards God, and his ultimate fall.

6. What can you do to guard yourself against these sins?

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. - James 1:21-24

Message:

So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life. Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don’t act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like – James 1:21-24

Once again, it requires a good spring clean of our lives – acknowledgment of sin, confession – and then a lifetime commitment to walking in the ways of the Lord.