

Lesson 32: The Golden Age of Solomon

A young man with an artistic talent was born in 1901. He tried to get a business going in 1919 and it crashed in less than a month. Later in 1923 he was at it again but it lasted less than a year and went under. Walt went from investor to investor with a sketch of a mouse asking for their help. He went bankrupt once, was taken over twice and had to start again. He determined to build a theme park that would provide family fun for the price of \$1.00 per ticket. Some laughed some just politely refused the proposal. Walt and his brother mortgaged all they had and opened Disneyland, then later one year after Walt's death in 1966 construction of Disney World in Florida began. Today what really matters about Walt Disney is not how he started but how he finished.

We come now to the Golden Age of Solomon. As we're going to see, Solomon was the opposite of Walt Disney—Solomon started out well, but unfortunately, he doesn't finish well, as we will soon see. Solomon had everything going for him.

Solomon is David's second son by Bathsheba. You may remember that their first son died as a punishment for their adulterous and murderous affair.

Solomon's reign has been called the "Golden Age" of ancient Israel. Yet, how Solomon ascended to the throne was anything but "golden."

Before David dies, he appoints as king his son Solomon, who is 12 years old at the time, with these words:

"I go the way of all the earth. You shall be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes and His commandments and His testimonies. As it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn." (1 Kings 2:2-3)

Few Biblical characters manifested such contradictory elements of character. Early in life he manifested an earnest, conscientious and religious spirit. He was prayerful and sought above all else wisdom and that for the good reason that he might be able to rule well. He built the temple and thereby magnified the worship of Jehovah.

Let's review Lesson 31: David the Shepherd King:

1. Where did the prophet Micah say that the Messiah would be born? **Bethlehem.**
2. Where was David from? **Bethlehem**
3. What are two characteristics that both David and the coming Messiah-Deliverer would have in common? **They would be rulers as well as shepherds.**
4. Why is the title Son of David a reference to the coming Messiah-Deliverer? **Because it means that the Messiah will come from David's family lineage as well as being a shepherd and a ruler.**
5. When David makes the famous statement in 2 Samuel 1:25, "Oh how the mighty have fallen." Who is he referring to? **King Saul and his son Jonathan.**
6. Once David becomes King, where does he move the capital? **From Hebron to Jerusalem.**
7. David runs into a problem while transporting the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle from Kiriath-Jearim to Jerusalem. What happens? **The ark is being transported on a cart and begins**

to totter. Uzzah reaches out and takes hold of the ark to steady it and is immediately struck dead.

8. Why did God allow this to happen? **Because David was not transporting the Ark of the Covenant in the proscribed manner.**
9. How was the Ark of the Covenant to be transported? **With the use of two poles and carried by four men.**
10. When David wants to build a house for God, what does God say? **God tells him “No thanks” because his hands are so bloody from all the wars he has fought; However, God tells David that He will have a house that will last forever, a dynasty that will endure forever.**
11. What is this promise that God makes to David called? **The Davidic covenant.**
12. “It was spring, when kings go out to war’ (2 Samuel 11:1), where was King David? **On his palace roof watching Bathsheba taking a purification bath.**
13. Once David discovers that Bathsheba is pregnant, what does he do about her husband Uriah? **He immediately summons Uriah to come home from battle so he can be with his wife.**
14. Does Uriah go home to his wife? **No, he sleeps at the door of the palace.**
15. What final step does David take to get rid of Uriah? **He instructs his commander, Joab, to place Uriah on the front lines of battle and then have all the troops of Israel withdraw, exposing Uriah to the enemy.**
16. How does God confront David regarding his affair with Bathsheba? **David receives a visit from the prophet Nathan who tells David a parable about a rich man with many herds who stole a poor man’s only lamb. At the end of the story, he looks David straight in the eye and says, “You’re the man!”**
17. Which one of David’s sons tried to steal the throne from his father? **Absalom**
18. What was Absalom’s distinguishing feature? **His hair, which ended up causing his death.**

A. Solomon’s Succession

When the book of 1 Kings opens, David is old and can no longer fulfill his royal duties. He also can no longer perform sexually, and that may sound weird, but leadership in antiquity was intimately tied to virility. Therefore, a beautiful girl named Abishag is brought to David’s bed, but as the text reads, “he was not intimate with her.” Then, David’s sons immediately began maneuvering for the throne.

B. Adonijah’s Rebellion

Theme: God is everywhere all the time; He knows everything.

Adonijah, David’s eldest surviving son, is the most obvious choice to be the new king, but Solomon also feels he has a claim. Bathsheba, who has a vested interest in seeing her son, Solomon, on the throne, reminds David of an oath he allegedly made saying Solomon would be the next king. David, perhaps, feeling he’s having a “senior moment,” declares Solomon king.

Let’s read about how Adonijah plots to become king.

1 Kings 1:5-10 (GW)

⁵ Adonijah, son of Haggith, was very handsome. His mother gave birth to him after Maacah had Absalom. Adonijah was boasting that he was king. So he got a chariot and horses and 50 men to run ahead of him.

⁶ His father had never confronted him by asking why he was doing this.

⁷ But Adonijah had discussed his actions with Joab (son of Zeruiah) and with the priest Abiathar, so they supported him.

⁸ But the priest Zadok, Benaiah (son of Jehoiada), the prophet Nathan, Shimei, Rei, and David's {thirty} fighting men did not join Adonijah.

⁹ Adonijah sacrificed sheep, cattle, and fattened calves at Zohelath Rock near En Rogel. He had invited all his brothers, the king's {other} sons, all the men of Judah, and the king's officials.

¹⁰ But he didn't invite the prophet Nathan, Benaiah, the fighting men, or his brother Solomon.

Meanwhile, just outside Jerusalem's walls, Adonijah is declared king by his own supporters. He is very handsome and he rounds up 50 of his supporters and a chariot and horses and stages a parade to proclaim that he is the new king. However, when Adonijah's supporters hear of David's choice of Solomon, they abandon Adonijah, and Adonijah, seeing his desperate predicament, rushes to God's altar and clings to it. Adonijah's actions reflect what was commonly understood in the ancient world as an appeal for mercy.

Solomon promises not to kill his older brother on one condition: he must never again conspire for the throne. Adonijah agrees, and he and his supporters are spared, but for only a moment. Soon, Solomon is summoned to his father's deathbed to receive his parting instructions. In a scene that is reminiscent of *The Godfather*, David tells Solomon to kill two men:

- **Joab.** Joab was David's general, who killed two men who were under David's protection. He also backed Adonijah in his attempt to take the throne.
- **Shimei.** Shimei was the previous king's (Saul) kinsman, who turned against David during a coup. Although Shimei "repented" of his "folly" when David regained the throne, he still couldn't be trusted.

David's instructions may sound harsh, but David knew that transitions between monarchs were precarious times for a nation and that treacherous people were capable of treacherous actions during such transitions.

On a more positive note, David also tells his son to love and obey God, for in doing so, his kingdom will prosper, and he will be blessed. Then, David, the shepherd boy who became a king dies.

C. Solomon's Wise Request

If you could ask God for one thing, what would it be? What is the one thing that if you had it—it would make your life better?

- If we had more money, we wouldn't have to stress about the bills.
- If we had more time, we would not have to stress about fitting everything in.
- If we had better health, we would not have to stress over the future and what that held.

Well, as we look at the life of Solomon, we're going to see a man who had it all, and yet, in many ways, he wasn't happy.

Theme: God communicates with man.

Solomon now sits securely on the throne. In addition, he follows his father's advice to love and obey God. Then, one night, God appears to Solomon.

1 Kings 3:4-15 (GW)

⁴ King Solomon went to Gibeon to sacrifice because it was the most important place of worship. Solomon sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings on that altar.

⁵ In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. He said, "What can I give you?"

⁶ Solomon responded, "You've shown great love to my father David, who was your servant. He lived in your presence with truth, righteousness, and commitment. And you continued to show him your great love by giving him a son to sit on his throne today.

⁷ "LORD my God, although I'm young and inexperienced, you've made me king in place of my father David.

⁸ I'm among your people whom you have chosen. They are too numerous to count or record.

⁹ Give me a heart that listens so that I can judge your people and tell the difference between good and evil. After all, who can judge this great people of yours?"

¹⁰ The LORD was pleased that Solomon asked for this.

¹¹ God replied, "You've asked for this and not for a long life, or riches for yourself, or the death of your enemies. Instead, you've asked for understanding so that you can do what is right.

¹² So I'm going to do what you've asked. I'm giving you a wise and understanding heart so that there will never be anyone like you.

¹³ I'm also giving you what you haven't asked for—riches and honor—so that no other king will be like you as long as you live.

¹⁴ And if you follow me and obey my laws and commands as your father David did, then I will also give you a long life."

¹⁵ Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream. He went to Jerusalem and stood in front of the ark of the LORD'S promise. He sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings and held a banquet for all his officials.

God says to Solomon, "Ask for whatever you want from Me" (1 Kings 3:5). Rather than ask for a long life, riches or power, Solomon asks for wisdom "to rule Your people and to distinguish between good and evil." This request so pleases God that He not only gives Solomon wisdom, but He gives the rest as well: longevity, wealth, and power. Solomon doesn't let his newfound gifts go to waste, but becomes a prolific author, songwriter, and scholar. Yet, the story that best exemplifies Solomon's wisdom involves two prostitutes and a baby.

D. Dividing the Truth with Solomon's Wisdom

Theme: God is everywhere all the time; He knows everything.

One of the most important duties of any king in the ancient world was to preside over difficult legal cases. And one day, Solomon is presented with a doozy.

1 Kings 3:16-28 (GW)

¹⁶ A short time later two prostitutes came to the king and stood in front of him.

- ¹⁷ One woman said to him, “Sir, this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth {to a son} while she was with me in the house.
- ¹⁸ Two days later this woman also gave birth {to a son}. We were alone. No one else was with us. Just the two of us were in the house.
- ¹⁹ That night this woman's son died because she rolled over on top of him.
- ²⁰ So she got up during the night and took my son, who was beside me, while I was asleep. She held him in her arms. Then she laid her dead son in my arms.
- ²¹ When I got up in the morning to nurse my son, he was dead! I took a good look at him and realized that he wasn't my son at all!”
- ²² The other woman said, “No! My son is alive—your son is dead.” The first woman kept on saying, “No! Your son is dead—my son is alive.” So they argued in front of the king.
- ²³ The king said, “This one keeps saying, ‘My son is alive—your son is dead,’ and that one keeps saying, ‘No! Your son is dead—my son is alive.’”
- ²⁴ So the king told his servants to bring him a sword. When they brought it,
- ²⁵ he said, “Cut the living child in two. Give half to the one and half to the other.”
- ²⁶ Then the woman whose son was still alive was deeply moved by her love for the child. She said to the king, “Please, sir, give her the living child. Please don't kill him!” But the other woman said, “He won't be mine or yours. Cut him {in two}.”
- ²⁷ The king replied, “Give the living child to the first woman. Don't kill him. She is his mother.”
- ²⁸ All Israel heard about the decision the king made. They respected the king very highly, because they saw he possessed wisdom from God to do what was right.

Two prostitutes come to Solomon with a baby, both claiming to be the mother. One prostitute explains that the other accidentally rolled over onto her own child and suffocated him, and then exchanged babies with her while she was asleep. The other prostitute said that was a lie, as the living baby was definitely her own. Because this was before DNA testing, Solomon comes up with another plan. “Let's cut the baby in two, then you both can have half.” While the one woman acquiesces, the other speaks up, “Please! Give her the baby. Only don't do any harm to the child!” (1 Kings 3:26). Giving the baby to the woman who just spoke, Solomon says, “You are the real mother.”

E. Solomon's Building Projects

After securing his reign, Solomon fortifies his kingdom. He rebuilds the wall and gate systems of several cities and establishes regional centers from which he and his officials can administer the nation. Also, he builds stables to house his abundant horses and chariots. Solomon also increases maritime trade to the south by constructing a fleet of ships on the Red Sea. Yet, most of Solomon's time and money is spent on building projects in his capital city of Jerusalem.

Although the Temple is called God's house, it is only symbolically so. As Solomon says in his prayer at the Temple's dedication:

“Yet will God really dwell on earth? The highest heavens cannot contain you, much less this Temple I have built.” – 1 Kings 8:27

F. The Queen of Sheba Visits Solomon

The Queen of Sheba, according to the biblical narrative, was a woman of great wealth, beauty, and power. Sheba, believed to be either in Ethiopia or Yemen by most biblical scholars, was a well-established city, and, although there is little evidence outside the Bible as to the nature of the monarchy and how it was established, it is clear that the Queen of Sheba ruled alone and was not enamored with the religions in her own land.

The Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem as she had “heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, [and] came to test Solomon with hard questions” (1 Kings 10:1). As God had granted Solomon the gift of wisdom (1 Kings 3:5–12), “nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her” (1 Kings 10:3).

1 Kings 10:1-13 (GW)

¹ The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's reputation. (He owed his reputation to the name of the LORD.) So she came to test him with riddles.

² She arrived in Jerusalem with a large group of servants, with camels carrying spices, a very large quantity of gold, and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she talked to him about everything she had on her mind.

³ Solomon answered all her questions. No question was too difficult for the king to answer.

⁴ When the queen of Sheba saw all of Solomon's wisdom, the palace he built,

⁵ the food on his table, his officers' seating arrangement, the organization of his officials and the uniforms they wore, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings that he sacrificed at the LORD'S temple, she was breathless.

⁶ She told the king, “What I heard in my country about your words and your wisdom is true!

⁷ But I didn't believe the reports until I came and saw it with my own eyes. I wasn't even told half of it. Your wisdom and wealth surpass the stories I've heard.

⁸ How blessed your men must be! How blessed these servants of yours must be because they are always stationed in front of you, listening to your wisdom!

⁹ Thank the LORD your God, who is pleased with you. He has put you on the throne of Israel. Because of your God's eternal love for the people of Israel, he has made you king so that you would maintain justice and righteousness.”

¹⁰ She gave the king 9,000 pounds of gold, a very large quantity of spices, and precious stones. Never again was such a large quantity of spices brought {into Israel} as those that the queen of Sheba gave King Solomon.

¹¹ Hiram's fleet that brought gold from Ophir also brought a large quantity of sandalwood and precious stones from Ophir.

¹² With the sandalwood the king made supports for the LORD'S temple and the royal palace, and lyres and harps for the singers. Never again was sandalwood like this imported {into Israel}, nor has any been seen {there} to this day.

¹³ King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba anything she wanted, whatever she asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal generosity. Then she and her servants went back to her country.

After a meal together, the Queen of Sheba declares how impressed she is with Solomon's answers, hospitality, and the reputation that preceded him. The story ends with an exchange of resources and the Queen of Sheba returning “with her retinue to her own country” (1 Kings 10:13).

G. Solomon's Mistakes

Beyond his many wives, close examination reveals that Solomon makes some other mistakes. In some ways, it's surprising to read of his mistakes because he had been given so much wisdom from the Lord. And as you will see, his mistakes seem to be "stupid mistakes" which do nothing to endear him to his people, but actually create dissention and division. I suppose it shows us that even with all the wisdom in the world, we can wander and do stupid things if we are not seeking the Lord and asking Him for direction.

Solomon's administration oppresses the northern tribes for the benefit of his own tribe of Judah. Solomon's large scale building projects cost a fortune, and increased taxes are a necessary evil. To collect funds, and also to increase his power base by weakening tribal alliances, Solomon creates 12 administrative districts based not on the traditional tribal borders but rather on geographical features and towns. This is somewhat how Europe came in and divided up the continent of Africa, not along tribal lines, but rather along geographical features, and it has caused so much turmoil and problems ever since.

Solomon also requires each of these districts to provide forced laborers one month out of the year in order to work on his various building projects. This "redistricting" and forced labor is difficult to accept, especially consider the Israelite's past history as slaves in Egypt. Moreover, Judah isn't taxed at all, though they receive the largest benefits from the taxation.

Furthermore, Solomon angers the northern tribes when he sells 20 towns from northern Israel to the Phoenician king Hiram. And, although the northern tribes once hosted the Tabernacle, now the Jerusalem Temple permanently houses the Ark of the Covenant, thus diminishing their religious influence. If things weren't bad enough, during the latter portion of Solomon's reign, several neighboring kingdoms that David conquered break away from Israelite control. Moreover, the northern tribes threaten to withdraw their support from Solomon and follow their own leader, Jeroboam, an official appointed by Solomon to supervise labor. Solomon makes an unsuccessful attempt to kill Jeroboam, who flees to Egypt, where he remains until Solomon's death.

Solomon, after a long and eventful reign of 40 yrs., passes away, leaving his throne to his son, Rehoboam.

1. Which of David's sons plots to steal the throne from David? **Adonijah, David's oldest surviving son.**
2. Who does David declare to be his successor? **Solomon.**
3. God comes to Solomon in a dream and offers to give Solomon whatever he wants. What does Solomon ask for? **A heart of wisdom and understanding so he can listen to God's people and do a good job leading them.**
4. What does God say in answer to this request? **God not only gives Solomon wisdom but riches, but wealth, power and longevity as well.**
5. What did Solomon do when confronted by the two prostitutes and the baby? **He decided to have the baby cut in half so each mother could have half the child, and at that point, the real**

mother cried out for the other woman to take the child so he wouldn't be harmed. The other woman actually wanted to have the child cut in half, and thus revealed that she was not the real mother.

6. What is Solomon's greatest building project? He built God's Temple, the crown jewel in all of Jerusalem.
7. Who visits Solomon and is enamored and amazed by his great wisdom? The Queen of Sheba.
8. What was some of the mistakes that Solomon made which led to the fracture and division of Israel? Solomon burdened his people with heavy taxes to finances all his projects, but jealousy and anger erupted because the district of Judah wasn't taxed at all. Furthermore, Solomon sells 20 towns in northern Israel to the Phoenician king, Hiram, and this turns the northern half of Israel against him.

Our next lesson 33: The Division of Israel.