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## Ruling the Kingdom I Kings 3:1-28

**Intro:** The books of I & II Kings tracks the history of the nation of Israel from the time of David up to the Babylonian captivity. The books of I & II Chronicles covers a good bit of the same historical material as I & II Kings but is written from a priestly perspective. I & II Kings is written from a royal perspective and covers the monarchs of the united nation of Israel as well as those of the divided kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. As such, our studies so far in I Kings have dealt with the questions of “who has the kingdom” and “how is the kingdom secured.” As it turns out, Solomon was David’s successor by the will of God and the abdication of David. Solomon’s kingdom was then established by 2 means: by obeying the Covenant Law and by bringing justice to the kingdom’s enemies.

The next logical question is: how will Solomon rule his kingdom. What will be the predominant character of his reign?

**1-4** – Solomon generally gets a lot of grief from commentators because of the information provided in these verses. I will admit that it all does sound a bit disconcerting, especially since Solomon’s heart will be turned from the Lord by the overwhelming persuasion of his multiplied pagan wives in his old age. And what is this about worshipping at the high places? David hasn’t been gone 2 years yet and the whole country has gone to pot! No, not exactly.

To start with, God’s prohibition on intermarriage in **Ex 34** and **Deut 7** specified the pagan groups that lived in the land of Canaan then and didn’t explicitly mention Egypt or any other people group. This prohibition was mainly concerned with keeping the nation of Israel faithful in their worship of and obedience to Yahweh. Israelites could marry anyone from any country as long as they were willing to convert to Judaism (Rahab, Ruth). Marriage among royalty was a common political strategy in the ancient world, much as it was in our recent past. It wasn’t just because royalty wanted to marry other royalty, but also because strife between nations could be avoided for the sake of family ties.

As far as the high places were concerned, at this time it appears that altars were allowed at various high places as long as they were unto the Lord and not corrupted by idolatry. From the book of Joshua through the books of Samuel, we have seen prophets, judges and the kings that came before Solomon sacrifice at places like Gilgal, Shiloh, Gibeon, Hebron, Nob and Kirjath Jearim. But, after the temple was erected, worship was centralized at the temple and it was sinful to offer sacrifices at any other location. At this point in Israel's history, the tabernacle was located at Gibeon and the Ark of the Covenant was housed in Jerusalem, brought there by King David (II Sam 6).

The key to understanding this passage is found in **vs3**, "Solomon loved the Lord..." We should take a positive view of Solomon here because, as we will see, Yahweh didn't seem to be offended by his high place worship service since He appears to him right there. At this stage of his young life, Solomon loved the Lord and was willing to adhere to the laws and statutes that his father had established before him.

Now, having said that, we should also mention that just because his marriage to the Egyptian princess was permitted under the Law of Moses and was a good political strategy doesn't mean it was a smart move on Solomon's part. As we saw in **ch2**, his kingdom would be established through obedience to the Covenant Law, not through political maneuvering. Unfortunately, Solomon's proclivity to marriage with foreign wives established a pattern that eventually ruined his spiritual life. The lesson for us is recognizing the spiritual danger associated with having mixed motives and a divided heart. Just because something is legal or logical doesn't mean it's beneficial for your Christian walk.

**5-15** – God's invitation to Solomon provides the theme for this passage: "Ask! What shall I give you?" The Hebrew verb translated "to ask" occurs 8 times in these verses – 5 times in **vs11** alone and since God is pleased with Solomon's response we can actually use Solomon's prayer as a primer in the art of prayer. This is not a prayer to be taken and repeated over and over again. No prayer in the Bible was intended to be used to replace the needs and intentions of your own heart. But, the prayers recorded in the Bible are certainly given for our instruction concerning the reasons why we should pray, how we should pray and what we should pray about.

Right away, we can see that the true incentive for prayer, the greatest reason why we should pray is that we serve a generous God (5b, 13-14)! Yahweh, the Covenant God of Israel, appears to Solomon in a dream in response to his worship and extends to him an open-ended offer: Ask! Talk about opening up the windows of heaven and pouring out a blessing! God is about to crank open the glorious fountain of covenant blessing; all Solomon has to do is just let Him know what he wants. That's better than winning the Power Ball since you won't have to worry about paying taxes on it or having all your distant relatives coming out of the woodwork.

You might say Good for Solomon, but I'm not a king! True, we don't have the same level of kingdom responsibility that he had but isn't the God we come to in prayer the same lavishly generous God? Isn't this the same God we read about in Jam 1:5? James is literally telling us that our God is a giving God. He's the same God we see here who tells Solomon to ask and then says in effect: All these things shall be added to you. Is this not the God of Mt 7:11? Do you see how God's generosity lures us to pray? God tempts us to pray by the sheer urgency He has to lavish good gifts upon us. We serve a generous God; that should be incentive enough for us to go to Him in prayer often

Next, we can see that the true foundation of prayer is the faithfulness of God (6-7a, 8). Notice what Solomon starts with; he doesn't jump right in asking for things, he begins by recounting the past – what God has already done! He first acknowledges Yahweh's faithfulness to His most recent promise – the Davidic covenant of II Sam 7. He notes that the first installment of the dynasty promised to David is now in place: Solomon is on the throne. Solomon then alludes to Yahweh's faithfulness to His more ancient promise to Abraham some 1000 yrs before. God had promised Abraham that his descendents would be as uncountable as the dust of the earth or the sand of the sea. Solomon now declares that God has done it. See the scope? From the very beginning of Israel's history to Solomon's day; old promises or new promises – God has kept them all!

Thus, this prayer is a declaration of the faithfulness of God. It begins with praise for God's complete dependability, which is right and proper in it self: God should be praised. But, it's also good for the one doing the praying because, as we praise God in prayer we are then encouraged in bringing our petitions for we begin to realize, as we rehearse God's track record, that

we are coming to a faithful God. Praise of God then becomes the basis for confidence. God has an exemplary track record for keeping promises. We can itemize them from Abraham to the empty tomb; all throughout church history and, most importantly, in our own lives! This is where we begin; it's this remembering that fosters gratitude in our hearts and confidence in our prayers.

Next, we see that the true concern of prayer is the people of God (7b-9). God's offer in vs5 was both a generous invitation and an important test. Your response to such an invitation will reveal your heart as Solomon's did. He first acknowledged his own shortcomings [inexperienced in leadership (7b)] and his great responsibility [ruling over God's chosen and innumerable people (9)]. Thus, he asks that God would give him an understanding heart, more literally: a hearing heart. The term "heart" includes all the intellect, affections and will that make up a man's soul. It doesn't just mean one's emotions as we refer to it today: the heart as opposed to the head. As far as the Bible is concerned, our head is in our heart. Also notice that Solomon doesn't ask for a hearing heart in order to feel, but to rule and discern.

But, the point here is: it's the overall welfare of God's people that drives Solomon's prayer. He's not concerned with how can he enhance his life but rather, how can he make God's people secure. In this, Solomon is a model for us. The focus of our prayers should be less concerned with how we can succeed and more concerned with how we can most benefit the people of God because concern for God's people is what controls Solomon's petition. Again, I'm no king but that shouldn't stop me from praying like one! Some anxiety is sinful but there is a holy anxiety, a sanctified concern that trembles for the welfare of God's people and always prays with one eye open for their good. Christians are suffering for their faith all over the world and in our own country, believers struggle with a multitude of obstacles in their faith. Should we not ask God for a hearing heart to wisely rule the small part of His kingdom that we serve?

Finally, the true goal of prayer is to please God (10-14). Vs10 tells us God was pleased and then God expresses His pleasure to Solomon by giving him what he asked for and all the stuff he didn't ask for – he won both showcases! This should be the goal of all of our prayer – to please the Lord! In fact, this should be the primary goal of all of our worship, public or private. If you serve on the worship team, the goal should be to please the Lord. If

you serve on the cleaning crew, the goal should be the same. If you're singing in the congregation, teaching a Sunday School class, witnessing on the street or giving in the offering box – the goal of all of that should be to please the Lord. The goal of every aspect of our worship is to give pleasure to God, an audience of One.

Why should we pray? We pray because we serve a generous and faithful God. His generosity lures us to pray and His faithfulness gives us confidence in our prayers. What should we pray for? We should pray for the benefit of God's people and to discover our part in that. Above all, we should pray for the purpose of pleasing God and when we do, He will not only give us what we ask for but He can also then trust us with so much more ([Eph 3:20](#)).

**16-27** – Solomon's prayer was a prayer for wisdom. In this section, the author records a small glimpse of royal court life to serve as the proof of that wisdom. The details of the case, as sordid as they are, are pretty clear and so is the difficulty – there were no other witnesses. This is purely a case of she said, she said. Solomon briefly rehearses the details of the case and then renders a solution – joint custody! As ridiculous as this solution might sound, what it actually did was fire up and offend the mother-love of the real mother to the point that she was willing to forgo her claim on the child and insist that the other woman be given the still living child. She figured that if she couldn't get justice for herself, she could still secure the life of her child. Her emotional outburst ([26](#)) was the only clue Solomon needed; he had detected the real mother ([27](#)). The true parental relationship was proved by love.

Let's stop a minute and consider Solomon's solution. The real mother is visibly upset and for good reason, but what about the other courtesans hanging around the room? What about the guy who was ordered to bring the sword? Was this Benaiah, the one Solomon ordered to execute Adonijah, Joab and Shimei in [ch2](#)? How do you think he felt right at that moment? He was simply executing righteous justice on those other traitors but this is just an innocent baby? He must have thought to himself, "Are you outside your mind?" I'm pretty sure everyone in the room that day was shocked, except the lady who was lying. Solomon's solution to this impossible case at first looked foolish – even dangerous. Yet, the wisdom of his approach was only understood after the matter was settled.

I've noticed this is often the reaction of people in the Bible right before God does something amazing. When Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, He didn't tell the servants what He was about to do, He just told them to fill the vessels with water and then carry the contents of the vessels to the master of the feast. "Are you trying to get me fired!" "I'll carry this out to the table and then go collect my things..." Or when Jesus showed up late to the tomb of Lazarus and said "Remove the stone." Sister Mary liked to have a fit! Wealthy people would typically be buried wrapped in 100 lbs of spices but a 100 lbs of spice is no match for 107 lbs of rot. "No thank you!" What about poor Gideon? He faced an enemy too numerous to count and when he finally mustered his army, God determined that he had too many and told him to send the vast majority of them home "What? We're already out-numbered!" What about when God told Abraham to take Isaac up the mountain and sacrifice him there?

In each one of these instances and in so many more not mentioned, understanding wasn't required – just obedience.

In the same way, in our own lives, the workings of God, even His judgments often seem strange, dangerous or even foolish to us. Sometimes we feel justified in arguing with God, or complaining to Him or even resisting, but we're not and we never will be. No matter how strange, dangerous or foolish God's work in our lives may appear, time will always inevitably show them to be perfect wisdom. The Bible politely teaches us that God's ways are not our ways, that they are so high above us that we cannot comprehend them. But, our understanding is not required, neither is our agreement. All that's required is our obedience! Let God do His work then stand back and see the wisdom in it.

**28** –What was the result of Solomon's solution? All Israel was more than impressed; they were in awe of Solomon's wisdom. In fact, when they heard of the judgment that the king had judged, they saw proof that the wisdom of God was in Solomon to do justice. When read in this light, we can see that this matches up precisely with what Solomon had asked God to give him in **v9**. Thus, God had clearly granted Solomon's request; He told Solomon He would give him a wise and discerning heart (**12**) and Israel saw obvious proof that the wisdom of God was in him.

One last point: we can hear Solomon's prayer for wisdom and clearly see

the proof of wisdom in his royal judgments but what's not so clear is that, unbeknownst to Solomon, he points beyond himself to the promise of wisdom in the distant future. Some of the primary words used in ch3 like judge, discern, wise or wisdom – these words will appear again in Isaiah's description of the coming Messiah in [Isa 11:2a, 3b, 4a](#). Thus, Solomon's request for a heating heart to judge and discern parallels that of the messianic King who won't judge cases simply by what He hears.

Solomon's wisdom and justice point beyond themselves to the One who was to come; One who'd be greater than Solomon. One who will outstrip Solomon in every aspect, One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge have their source. And if such a King has already begun to reign, as [Eph 1:20-22](#) states, then shouldn't we as His subjects assume that He will never allow or ordain anything to come into our lives except that which is in line with wisdom at its highest and best? Do you possess that confidence, that assurance in the God you serve today? The wisdom God gave to Solomon is clearly and plainly seen in our text and yet, a greater than Solomon has come and if you have been born again by the blood of Jesus Christ, you serve that greater One. Walk assured of His wisdom.

There are other parallels between Solomon and Jesus Christ, even in our text. It's obvious that like his father David, Solomon also granted the common people access to the king. But, for Solomon to receive to prostitutes before his throne was certainly an act of condescension. Like Jesus, Solomon welcomed publicans and sinners but that's where the comparison ends. Solomon could only offer them wise decisions to solve their problems but Jesus did more than solve their problems; He forgave their sins and changed their hearts! Has He done the same for you?

What is the evidence? Where is the proof? The power of the divine presence of Jesus Christ in the life of a believer is so great, so transformative, that it cannot help but manifest itself in and through their life. If you cannot point to an ongoing transformation, a continual work of sanctification in which the Holy Spirit is slowly but surely making you into the image of Jesus, then you need to stop and take stock of your life and determine once and for all if you are really in the faith.

God's grace is still being extended to a lost and dying world. Will you not accept it? 😊