

## 11/7/2010 Solomon 1 Kings 3:3-15; 11:1-13

### A Wise and Foolish King

*Three questions to ponder: 1) How do you define wisdom? 2) Who is the wisest person that you know? 3) Can you think of a time that you did something foolish?*

In the 2001 movie entitled “Zoolander,” Derek Zoolander is a self-centered and materialistic character. He thinks the world falls apart when he loses the Male Model of the Year award to his rival, Hansel. He then wonders if there’s more to life than being “ridiculously good looking” and very rich. Ultimately, his problem is that he thought the world revolved around him – he was so preoccupied with himself that nothing else seemed to matter or to exist. The same could probably be said for the fate of King Solomon, who first became known for his wise and understanding heart (movie example from *Here We Stand*, confirmation curriculum from Augsburg Fortress).

Solomon, who we meet in parts of 1 Kings as well as in 1 and 2 Chronicles, receives the gift of wisdom from God. If you don’t remember, he is the son of David and Bathsheba (the woman whom David spotted on the rooftop). Solomon, with the help of his mother and the prophet Nathan, outmaneuvers his older brother (Adonijah) to become king. He marries one of Pharaoh’s daughters, which is ironic in the fact that the Israelites were once enslaved by the Pharaoh; and unfortunate, because it foreshadows the problems that arise from marrying women of other religions. But before we get to his downfall, first we have the story of God appearing to him in a dream and Solomon asking for an “understanding mind” or a “wise and discerning heart (NIV).” It’s good that he asks for that because he is young and doesn’t have enough knowledge for ruling as a king. Since he asks for wisdom, God also gives him riches and honor. Basically, things look good for him. He is able to use his wisdom as a ruler. Following our reading in chapter 3, we have the story of the two women who come to the king both claiming to be the child’s mother and Solomon wisely finds a way to discern who the real mother is.

Not only is Solomon remembered for his wisdom, but also for the building of the Jerusalem Temple – the sacred place that becomes the center of worship for the people. During his reign as king, he increases power and wealth, experiences military expansion, has a lavish household, and takes on massive building projects. As amazing as one of these projects is --the building of the Temple -- it was done on the backs of people he enslaved in order to do the work. Again, a ruler chosen by God is showing off their ugliness.

If we had left Solomon on the success of the first use of his wisdom and ignored how the Jerusalem Temple was built, we would have a great story about a great Biblical hero. Yet, just as we are flawed, so are the heroes of the Bible. We need to know the rest of the story. When we venture into 1 Kings 11, we realize that Solomon has begun to focus on himself and forgotten about the true God he is to worship. Another thing that King Solomon is known for his the number of wives that he had – in the hundreds. Now, as strange as it may sound, it wasn't necessarily multiple wives that was his complete downfall. There was an allowance for kings to have numerous wives in the Israeli law codes. Many of the wives were gotten for political reasons – including the wife he made out of Pharaoh's daughter. We come to 1 Kings 11:6, and suddenly things start to sound familiar – Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord (part of the problem/cycle from the book of Judges! And God had warned them about what it would mean for them when the people asked for a king; it's exactly what they are getting.) What truly became his downfall was that he began to build temples and altars of sacrifice to other gods to please his wives; and he himself lost sight of worshipping only the one true God. He fell into idolatry! God tells Solomon that he and the kingdom will be punished. The kingdom will be divided when a son of Solomon takes the throne and eventually the magnificent Temple that was built will be destroyed. Ironically, Solomon's name relates to the common Hebrew word "Shalom," which means peace. The beginning of his reign was about peace, but it is shattered now.

We can follow the pattern and the story that we receive in the Bible and learn about how God is at work in God's story! We learn a few important things

about Solomon that also help us understand God's relationship with us and claim on us:

1. He didn't go to God; God approached him in a dream. God's grace can break through into our everyday realities.
2. Solomon was a mixture of good and bad motives/intentions – just like all of us!
3. Solomon's life wasn't all neat and clean – it was actually quite messy, and yet God acted through it. We can also know that God will work through the messiness of our own lives.
4. For Solomon, the possession of wisdom did not guarantee that it was used (*Quest Study Bible*)! Even though he was given the ability to know good and evil, it didn't mean he would always choose good over evil. (The same can be said for us – how often do we *not* choose what is good for us in the eyes of God?) We too are given gifts from God, but because we are fallible, we at times choose to use them incorrectly.

Once again, God continues to work through sinners! Once again, what we intend for evil, God can turn into something for good. God is faithful beyond all of our measurements! I'll admit it would be a much better story about Solomon if we had skipped chapter 11, but the Bible gives us an honest picture of the people of the Bible and still God works through them. That, in itself, is good news. If God works through a wise yet idolatrous leader such as Solomon, surely God can work through you and through me. (idea – Christian resource institute)

Let us pray. O Lord, give each one of us a listening heart. By your grace, help each one of us to devote our hearts to you totally. Amen (taken from a prayer from Christian resource institute)

### **Helpful Resources**

- *Here We Stand* confirmation resource from Augsburg Fortress
- *Quest Study Bible*
- Juliana Clasen article on *Working Preacher* website
- *Narrative Lectionary* podcast
- *The Lectionary Commentary*, Editor Roger E VanHorn