

## 1 Kings 3:1-28

### The Wisdom of Solomon

Remember that Solomon means "peaceful," from the root *shalom*. He was called Jedidiah (= "beloved of Yahweh") by Nathan the prophet.

He was considered by the Rabbis, who glorified him, to have been the counterpart of David, his father: Each reigned forty years, and over the whole world; both wrote books and composed songs and fables; both built altars and transported the Ark of the Covenant with great ceremony; in both dwelt the Holy Ghost (Cant. R. l.c.); and like David, all Solomon's sins were forgiven by God (Cant. R. l.c.).

Praise for Solomon in rabbinical literature reached fantastic heights, similar to that for the Messiah. His realm is described by the Rabbis as having extended, before his fall, over the upper world inhabited by the angels and over the whole of the terrestrial globe with all its inhabitants, including all the beasts, fowls, and reptiles, as well as the demons and spirits. His reign was then so glorious that the moon never decreased, and good prevailed over evil. His control over the demons, spirits, and animals augmented his splendor, the demons bringing him precious stones, besides water from distant countries to irrigate his exotic plants.

The Kabbalah stories are even wilder: "Solomon used to sail through the air on a throne of light placed on an eagle, which brought him near the heavenly *yeshibah* as well as to the dark mountains behind which the fallen angels 'Uzza and 'Azrael were chained. The eagle would rest on the chains; and Solomon, by means of a ring on which God's name was engraved, would compel the two angels to reveal every mystery he desired to know."

(It's interesting that there is such an emphasis on his power over demons, pointing toward Jesus' ministry of casting out demons and evil spirits).

On the other hand, many rabbis were harshly critical of Solomon's later turn toward idolatry.

This story illustrates that criticism:

"When God appointed Solomon king over every created thing, He gave him a large carpet sixty miles long and sixty miles wide, made of green silk interwoven with pure gold, and ornamented with figured decorations. Surrounded by his four princes, Asaph b. Berechiah, prince of men, Ramirat, prince of the demons, a lion, prince of beasts, and an eagle, prince of birds, when Solomon sat upon the carpet he was caught up by the wind, and sailed through the air so quickly that he breakfasted at Damascus and supped in Media. One day Solomon was filled with pride at his own greatness and wisdom; and as a punishment therefor the wind shook the carpet, throwing down 40,000 men. Solomon chided the wind for the mischief it had done; but the latter rejoined that the king would do well to turn toward God and cease to be proud; whereupon Solomon

felt greatly ashamed."

**1 Kings 3:1** - "And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about."

Chronologically, this happened in the fourth year of Solomon's reign.

Solomon - still a teenager at this time - already had a wife, Naamah the Ammonitess, and his son Rehoboam was born a year before he became king.

The rabbis say the daughter of Pharaoh was first converted to worship Yahweh. Although Solomon was later said to have been drawn away into idolatry by his other foreign wives, no mention is made of any Egyptian deities.

In fact, the rabbis suppose that the **Song of Solomon** and **Psalms 45** were both written about this woman. And since these scriptures both picture the Bride of Christ drawn from both Gentiles and Jews, it fits spiritually. As Gentile believers, we were called out of the world (Egypt) to join with Israel.

Rabbi Jose declares that Solomon's sole intention in this marriage was to convert the daughter of Pharaoh to Judaism, bringing her thus under the wings of the Shekinah.

**1 Kings 3:2** - "Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days."

- They sacrificed particularly at the high place in Gibeon, where the tabernacle was. But until the Temple was built, they could legally sacrifice to the Lord elsewhere.

But in the case of Solomon, the writer foresees his future idolatry:

**1 Kings 3:3** - "And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places."

The rabbis say he delayed building the Temple for four years, therefore incurring the Lord's displeasure.

### **Solomon's Dream**

**1 Kings 3:4-5** - "And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee."

A thousand burnt offerings in one day, according to the rabbis. Gibeon is four or five miles from Jerusalem, and was where the Tabernacle was set up, although the Ark had been brought to Jerusalem by David.

**1 Kings 3:6** - "And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day."

Remember, David sinned greatly, but he also repented whole heartedly. Therefore his righteousness and uprightness was from God, not from his own efforts.

Solomon's reign was fulfillment of the prophecy of Nathan in **2 Samuel 7**.

**1 Kings 3:7** - "And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in."

This is a great statement of humility. "Going in or out" is an allusion to shepherding, leading the sheep to good pasture and protecting them.

### **Solomon's Need for Discernment**

**1 Kings 3:8-9** - "And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?"

**1 Kings 3:10-12** - "And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee."

Solomon's unique wisdom was specifically for discernment in cases of law, politics and governing.

Solomon is a type of Christ in this, who alone outshines him in wisdom:

- **Matthew 12:42** - "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." (See **1 Kings 10:1** and **2 Chronicles 9:1**)

And More...

**1 Kings 3:13** - "And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days."

God's way is to give 20 percent over what is expected, "pressed down and running over" in blessings.

But His promise is contingent on our faithfulness:

**1 Kings 3:14** - "And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days."

Later in life, Solomon's wisdom could not keep him from being led astray by his foreign wives to worship other gods. The rabbis claim that Solomon did not live a long life because of his idolatry.

Solomon wrote several psalms and a portion of the Book of Proverbs. It seems to be probable that his life formed the basis of the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

**1 Kings 3:15** - "And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants."

The peace offering was one in which the priest, the offerer along with family and friends and God all shared in.

### 'Cut the Baby in Half'

As an example of Solomon's gift of wisdom, this incident is related. The rabbis disagree over whether they women were prostitutes or inn keepers. But no husbands are mentioned and they were living together in one house. If they were prostitutes it is amazing the case even came before the king.

One hermeneutical view (Cant. Rabbah 1:1:10) maintains that they were *yevamot* (widows whose husbands had died childless), based on the assumption that harlots usually do not want the children born as a result of their profession and therefore abandon them. These women, this theory goes, were subject to Levirate marriage, so they wanted to bear children to be freed from that obligation.

According to another opinion, they were spirits and not human beings! (Cant. Rabbah loc. cit.)

**1 Kings 3:16-22** - ""Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were

together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.

"And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear.

"And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king."

This is a truly tragic situation. One woman is obviously mad with grief over her dead child, which causes her to switch the babies and refuse to acknowledge her loss. The other mother is horrified and outraged that her child was taken. No other witnesses were available to testify.

**1 Kings 3:25** - "And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other."

The amazing thing to me is that this famous ruling concerned two women who were at the fringes of society and normally would have been executed themselves (if they were prostitutes) according to Jewish law.

(This also has a disturbing similarity to the Akedah, when God commands Abraham's to sacrifice his son Isaac. In one case God "provided" the ram as a substitute and Isaac was spared. In the other, God provided true justice and the child was spared. Not sure how that all fits together, though).

Other rabbinical explanations:

God thus fulfilled the request of David, who had prayed to God (**Psalms 72:1**): "O God, endow the king with Your judgments, the king's son with Your righteousness." David said: "Master of the Universe, 'endow the king's son with Your judgments'—just as You judge without witnesses, so, too, let Solomon judge without witnesses." God responded: "Let it be so." **I Chronicles 29:23** accordingly attests: "Solomon successfully took over the throne of the Lord"—but can flesh and blood sit on the throne of the Lord? Rather, Solomon judged like his Maker, without witnesses, in the judgment of the prostitutes (Midrash Tehilim 72:2).

The Rabbis include the judgment of Solomon among the three instances in which God appeared in a court and spoke: in the court of Shem, in the court of Samuel and in the court of Solomon, in the trial of the prostitutes (Midrash Tehilim loc. cit.). Solomon determined who the real mother was and ruled: "Give the live child to her, and do not put it to death," at which point a Heavenly voice went forth, saying (at the end of that verse): "she is its mother" (Babylonian Talmud, Makkot 23b).

According to this midrashic account, if the Heavenly voice had not gone forth, the problematic nature of this ruling would have remained, since it could always be argued that the woman deceived Solomon and merely pretended to have mercy on the infant so that she would be thought to be the child's real mother. But the Heavenly voice that intervened unequivocally established the correctness of Solomon's ruling and that his judgment was just.

This story shows the limitations of reductive human reasoning and the need to read the "signs of the times - *"kairōn"* (Matthew 16:3) as Jesus said. i.e. the pre-appointed time when things come together, as manifested in the events and situations confronting us. Jesus had already given many signs that the kingdom of God was at hand, which the leaders did not recognize. The signs of the times are ascertained through divine wisdom.

### **Messiah?**

Solomon knew that his mother Bathsheba had committed adultery with David. Perhaps that is why he accepted the case of the two prostitutes.

Some see a reference to the Messiah in this story. There's a son born, there's one dead, one alive and it happens in three days. One son is killed unknowingly. One son is not recognized.

On some sense we are the harlots. We are guilty, but God hears our cause and mercy is dispensed.

Solomon was wiser than David. When Mephiboseth and Ziba argued over whether Mephiboseth betrayed David or not, we are told that David could not judge between the two.

**John 8** records a story in which Jesus judged a case in which there was no witnesses at all when He judged the woman caught in adultery. Solomon had two opposing witnesses. Jesus judged his case without any witnesses at all, which is why he is superior to Solomon.

And recall Jesus's wisdom as a boy lost in Jerusalem:

- **Luke 2:46-47** - "...after three days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers."

**1 Kings 3:28** - "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment."

A related rabbinical joke:

“Daughter-in-law and mother-in-law cannot serve as witnesses one about the other because they are presumed to hate one another” (Maimonides, Laws of Divorce 12:16) (Ruth and Naomi are the exception)

Once two *hatanim* (bride grooms) were ordered from a far away yeshiva to marry two daughters of the town, even though they had never seen each other before. Unfortunately while crossing the river outside the town, one of the *hatanim* was drowned. Now the families came to the rabbi of the town to decide who gets the remaining living *hatan* and who gets the dead one. The rabbi consulted the story of King Solomon and the two prostitutes with one living child and one dead one. The rabbi then asked that the living *hatan* be cut in half to share equally. One protested that the *hatan* should be allowed to live, give hi to the other family. The second mother-in-law said: cut him in half. The rabbi triumphantly announced, “Now there is no need to cut the *hatan* in half. We know that the true mother-in-law is the one who wanted him cut in half, so give him to her daughter.” Mother-in-law’s instincts for the daughter-in-law or son-in-law are the opposite of maternal instincts for the natural child, who is being taken away by the interloper spouse.