
March 29 : Scriptures 2 Samuel 21-24

SUMMARY

Today's reading is a series of events tying up the final part of David's life. It includes a hodge-podge of notable events in specific chronological order, although some clues are dropped about the approximate time in David's life when they occurred.

We begin with chapter 21 and the three-year famine. We need to keep in mind that this is no ordinary occurrence, and a famine implies something is wrong. Israel's regular rainfall begins in mid-Fall (October) and tapers off in mid-spring (April). If Israel gets its normal rain, the hot, dry summer months are not a problem. However, if the early and later rains don't arrive, the crops don't grow well, and the harvests are poor.

The rains are God's barometer reflecting Israel's faithfulness. The word for "heaven" in Hebrew is *shamayim* (*shah-ma-yeem'*) which comes from two Hebrew words, *sham* (there) and *mayim* (water). Heaven, God's throne room, is where Israel's lifegiving water comes. If the Israelites displease the King by breaking His covenant, He can easily shut off the water supply to 1) get their attention or 2) punish them. When the King is pleased, then the water is turned back on. Really, it's that simple. See for yourself:

"If you carefully obey my commands I am giving you today, to love the Lord your God and worship him with all your heart and all your soul, I will provide rain for your land in the proper time, the autumn and spring rains, and you will harvest your grain, new wine, and fresh oil. I will provide grass in your fields for your livestock. You will eat and be satisfied. Be careful that you are not enticed to turn aside, serve, and bow in worship to other gods. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you. He will shut the sky, and there will be no rain; the land will not yield its produce, and you will perish quickly from the good land the Lord is giving you" (Deuteronomy 11:13-17. Also 28:17, 24, 38-40).

So, if there's a famine in the land, then there must be something wrong, and the Lord is pushing Israel to deal with it. As we read, we quickly discover there's been a violation of a covenant. No, not the Sinai/Moses covenant. Some action violated Joshua's covenant he and the Israelite leaders made with the Gibeonites. The Lord says it was due to "Saul and to his bloody family, because he killed the Gibeonites" (21:1). King Saul and his family sought to destroy some of the remaining Canaanites in Israel's land in a fit of zeal. So what's the problem with that? Weren't the Israelites supposed to destroy the Canaanites? The Amorites were one of the Canaanite tribes, and the Gibeonites were a clan within the Amorites (21:2). Fair game, right?

No! Despite using deception, the Gibeonites scored a covenant deal with Joshua and the leadership that the Gibeonites wouldn't be killed. Scam or not, a deal is a deal, and a covenant is a covenant (Joshua 9:15, 18-19, 2 Samuel 21:2). God steps in to enforce the Gibeonite covenant terms because His representatives, the Israelites, sealed the deal and, therefore, acted (albeit foolishly) on Yehovah's behalf. And yet, Saul (God's royal representative) fell upon the Gibeonites in his misguided zeal. So, the guilt of breaking the Gibeonite covenant lies with Saul and his family.

Covenants often demand equal justice. Gibeonites died for Saul's sake. Therefore, since Saul was not alive, members of Saul's family must die for the Gibeonites' sake as just retribution. The Gibeonites demand the execution of seven of Saul's sons. Why seven? Seven in Hebraic thinking is a "complete" number. The sons are executed. Then why did the Gibeonites lay them out on a rock? To show God that the Israelites had made restitution for their covenant violation. The Gibeonites have accepted the Israelites' action. But then why let the bodies lay exposed to the weather for seven months (21:9-10), from the barley harvest (Spring) to the final harvest (Fall)? Because the rain tapers off in April and resumes in October. Only the resumption of the rain in the Fall could prove if all covenant demands were satisfied and the covenant once again unviolated. Okay, but what about the Torah command about burying the bodies of executed people on the same day they die (Deuteronomy 21:23)? The Gibeonites were not under the Torah's command; only the Israelites were. Saul's wife, Rizpah, whose two sons were among those executed and displayed, took up watch over the bodies to make sure the wild animals and birds didn't desecrate the bodies. Imagine sitting in grief over two sons and five nephews for seven months! When David heard of it, he collected Saul's and Jonathan's remains with the executed men and buried them with honor in the family tomb. And the rains came (21:14).

We now move to another exciting episode in David's life – the Battle of the Philistine Giants. Four giants are part of this account; Ish-benob, Saph, a giant called Goliath (possibly a brother, not the Goliath David took out), and an unnamed giant. There's a discussion about whether these giants were the offspring or brothers of the original Goliath. Suffice to say, they are no match for David and his men! But after one giant almost kills David, that was enough for the king's men. They finally realize it's more important for David to sit things out and direct from behind the front line from that point on (21:17). Aha! This event must have occurred in David's later years as his strength and skills are starting to wane.

David's *Thanksgiving Song* or *Song of Praise* fills the entirety of chapter 22 and is repeated almost verbatim in Psalm 18:1-50. It is a remarkable song! Like so many other worship

songs and hymns, this psalm began as David's testimony song, and it later worked its way into Israel's hymn book. This psalm is a praise song to Yehovah for rescuing David from Saul's hand and deliverance from all such enemies. It breaks down as a psalm of deliverance (22:2-20), connecting material about David's integrity (22:21-28) and David's victory song (22:29-51) with a final affirmation of David's anointing that will be passed from him to his descendants forever (22:51).

David's last words and list of exploits are recorded in chapter 23. David's last words are like a reply from Yehovah to David's previous psalm and could have served as a "last will and testament" to his son, Solomon. David uses a "Thus says the Lord" phrase in 21:3, indicating that he is prophesying, the Holy Spirit speaking through him. What does the prophecy say? It's the "secret" of David's success as Israel's king and God's standard for those who rule. 1) A king after God's heart must be just, ruling in fear of God. A righteous ruler knows, understands, rightly interprets, and properly applies the Lord's Word to their own lives and to their way of governing others. Where does a king find wisdom, right laws, justice, and mercy for all decisions? God's Word. 2) A king after God's heart brings revelation from God, is a blessing to their people, is refreshing, brings clarity, is uplifting, and encourages life and purity. In a sense, God's ruler lifts people and serves them to make them great. How different from the world's standard of self-serving leadership! In 23:5-7, David contrasts himself with the wicked. The Lord has established him and his family, but the wicked will eventually perish.

After David speaks of himself, the text turns to his elite troops – David's Mighty Men (23:8-39). This is how the list breaks down:

- The Three – Josheb-Basshebeth, Eleazar, Shamma.
- Abishai, the leader of the Three.
- Benaiah, the leader of the Cherethites and Pelethites, David's bodyguards.

The exploits of these guys are extraordinary and prove their utter devotion to David as members of his D-Team! They've come a long way since the cave of Adullam, haven't they? But there's one small verse that gives us a twinge of pain when we read it, "and Uriah the Hethite (Hittite)" (21:39). Yes, *that* Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, whom David killed to cover up his sin of adultery. David was willing to sacrifice one of his most excellent warriors to "cover his sin tracks." Didn't we just read about David's integrity and blamelessness before the Lord? Yes. And David suffered for his sin along with many others. But in the end, Yehovah is a God who forgives, and when the end comes, and this whole world is restored, and the Lord's justice prevails, we'll better understand how all of this worked out. For now, we stand in amazement of the Lord's grace.

And speaking of the Lord's grace, we have the final event of David's life in 2 Samuel 24. David decides to take a census of his people, which becomes another major sin in David's life. What? Counting people? Who cares? Well, God does. Why? What's so sinful about this?

According to the rabbis, the Torah commands that no census should be taken unless the Lord commands it, and only according to His way (see Exodus 30:11-16; Numbers 1:1ff). Some of them, like the Levites, would be left out of the count (Numbers 1:49) or counted separately (Numbers 4:2, 22). According to the Tanak (Hebrew Bible) commentary (Art Scroll, Stone edition), "Counting the population is improper, even sinful, because it is likely to be motivated by a vain desire to know the exact strategic potency of the nation, which in turn leads the people to believe that their salvation is in strength of numbers and not in God's desire for their well-being. Consequently, such a counting of the population is likely to bode ill for the people involved, which is why Joab tried to convince David not to do it."

This is true. Joab tried to discourage David from taking the census because he recognized it was an act of David's pride, to know just how mighty he was by the strength of his army. Hadn't pride brought down Absalom? Who would understand better than Joab, who both promoted Absalom, then killed him when Absalom's hair became caught in a tree. Joab finally realized the man he had promoted was toxic for Israel and would bring trouble to the people through his pride. Joab now sees the same thing in his uncle, King David, Absalom's father.

We know this is a sin because of what it says in 1 Chronicles 21:1, "Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to count the people of Israel." But wait! 2 Samuel 24:1 says, "The Lord's anger burned against Israel again, and he stirred up David against them to say, 'Go, count the people of Israel and Judah.'" Which is it – God or Satan? Does God tempt people to sin? No. God does not tempt (James 1:13-15), but He does allow testing, even when He knows the outcome. Everything, including Satan himself, is under God's sovereign control. In this case, whatever happened to bring about the Lord's anger, He would use David to chastise Israel. David prevails upon Joab.

Joab and his team take nine months and twenty days to complete the task. I just want to point out that it's helpful to read parallel accounts of this in 1 Chronicles 21, which gives us an additional perspective. *God is doing something here for a purpose, and He's using Satan, David, and a judgment against Israel for an unstated reason to bring about something new.*

When the census ends, David's heart condemns him, and he responds immediately just as he had when confronted about Bathsheba, taking full responsibility (24:10). Yehovah gives David three choices, all of which have the effect of messing up the census numbers via deaths. The deaths are God's judgment against whatever Israel did to violate their covenant with Him. The varying lengths of time and modes of death allow David to choose between under man's hand or God's hand if He would extend mercy to His people.

The plague begins. Seventy thousand people die throughout the land from north to south. Just as it reaches the outskirts of Jerusalem, the Lord commands His angel of death to stop. Now use your imagination. For three days, plague rages around Jerusalem, then suddenly, its advance stops. David looks up and sees the Lord's angel striking the people. David cries out for the Lord to stop taking it out on the people and take it out on him instead.

The Lord's word comes to David's seer, Gad, to set up an altar on Araunah the Jebusite's threshing floor. First, what's a threshing floor? A threshing floor is a naturally occurring prominent, flat place at the top of a hill. It's usually windswept so that when the thresher throws the crushed wheat into the air, the wind separates the wheat from the chaff. The grain falls at your feet while the debris blows away. As David intercedes for his "sheep" in the wind of God's judgment, he's falling like wheat at the Lord's feet, begging for their lives.

Second, why build an altar at that location? The threshing floor of Araunah was located on the hilltop immediately north of David's palace. It is also known as *Mount Moriah*, where Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. Starting with Solomon's reign, this location would become known as the *Temple Mount*. Do you see the Lord is stacking picture upon picture at the same site? A father sacrificing his son. A Temple that secures forgiveness and atonement for God's people. A king crying out for the lives of God's people.

While we may not like God allowing Satan to push David into an "illegal" act or that Israel's Divine King used a plague to punish His people for an unknown reason, we know God has a plan in motion. Without all the necessary elements coming into position over nearly 2,000 years before Jesus and 2,000 years after Jesus, God's plan will not come to fruition. Even in the ugly things of life, God is at work to bring His plan to completion.

INSIGHT

There's some discussion why David picked up five smooth stones just before he faced Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. On the surface, David needed additional "ammunition" if the first

stone didn't knock Goliath out. Others smile and answer, "No, because Goliath had four brothers." Either way, the Lord's men took down the remnants of angelic-human crossbreeding, obviously one of the reasons why Yehovah had His people cleanse Canaan. Rather than just wiping out demonic religions and evil practices, perhaps there was also an inhuman genetic line tainting humanity that had to be eliminated as well? We know that from the Fall, there was a spiritual stain on humanity. At the close of this reading, we read of God setting into place the things needed to remove that stain as well, forever.

March 30 : Scriptures 1 Kings 1-2

SUMMARY

Jesus taught us, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:24). This verse is a tremendous summary of 1 & 2 Kings.

What are 1 & 2 Kings about? It's a record of righteousness and wickedness, of kings and prophets, of one people split into two kingdoms because they were not united in serving God. The Northern Kingdom of Israel chose to walk from God and not turn back. The Southern Kingdom of Judah vacillated between faithfulness and rebellion, which ultimately led to the same fate as the Northern Kingdom, defeat and exile from the Lord's land. 1 & 2 Kings vividly display what happens when God's people *deliberately* walk from His direction, when God's leaders fail to lead, and when God steps in to discipline His wayward people.

What is the purpose of 1 & 2 Kings? The author does more than just record a chronology of Israel's kings. The author repeatedly focuses the spotlight on Israel's spiritual condition, which affected their standing before the Lord. The adage, "As the father goes, so goes the family," is proven true. Israel's spiritual condition is linked to her kings and their walk with the Lord. Therefore, the author spends much of the account evaluating Israel's leadership. Both Kings and Chronicles use phrases such as "but he did evil in the eyes of the Lord" and "he did right in the eyes of the Lord," among other spiritual evaluations.

Chapter 1 opens up with a very elderly King David at the end of his life. Like most older adults, he's finding it challenging to stay warm. In the winter months, Israel can be cold and damp during the rainy season. Undoubtedly, the many years of warfare and exposure to the elements had taken their toll on David's body. So, his family brings a young woman to him to serve him and keep him warm. This method is actually a recognized medical procedure documented by the Greek doctor Galen. We're told she's a virgin. Why is that important? Because no other man could then claim the throne due to a previous marriage to her. It may seem irrelevant that Abishag is David's attendant. However, by the end of chapter two, we'll see that Abishag plays a crucial role in setting off a brutal chain of events that dramatically affects Solomon and the Lord's plan for Israel.

Since David is an elderly man, it's logical for his sons and supporters to think about the inevitable power transfer. But the sad thing about having many sons is everyone's question about who is to succeed David as Israel's king. Adonijah was David's fourth son

through Haggith, his fourth wife. The order of David's foremost sons was as follows: Amnon, Chiliab, Absalom, and Adonijah. With Amnon, Chiliab (little is written of him), and Absalom out of the picture, Solomon's elder brother Adonijah makes his play for the throne. And the intrigue begins!

Adonijah went to work with his PR team to exalt himself in the peoples' eyes (1:5). Just like his older half-brother Absalom, Adonijah assembled an impressive entourage to give the impression of the King's approval and to build his gravitas. The sad part is King David never rebuked him, although the king was aware of what Adonijah was doing. David does seem to have been an absentee father to his many children and a lax disciplinarian. Hence, the family troubles. Hey Adonijah, it must be okay if Dad doesn't say anything, right?

Adonijah adds some clout to his posse by recruiting two key personnel from his father's court – Joab, David's primary commander, and Abiathar, the High Priest. But on David's side, the heavy-weights remain – Zadok the priest, Benaiah the leader of David's Mighty Men, David's royal guard, and a few others of note. Still, the palace coup is building.

Adonijah sets his "coronation" day and begins the process at En-Rogel, near Jerusalem. By holding his feast at En-Rogel, Adonijah's feast is at a very public location, reaching many people and quickly spreading the news. However, En-Rogel is not as official as the Gihon spring, the official site of Solomon's soon coronation. It seems Adonijah and his co-conspirators chose the unofficial and "beyond reach" site to initiate their plot. Adonijah invites his co-conspirators, but not those who support the "other guys." His idea is to get his royal status as king established as quickly and firmly as possible.

Nathan hears of it and arranges for both Bathsheba and him to break the news to David, one after the other. As the Torah says, a matter will be established with the testimony of two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). When David realizes Adonijah is making a power play for the throne, the elderly king finally takes action. He assures Bathsheba their son, Solomon, will be Israel's king (1:30). David then calls in his big three heavy-hitters, all of whom the Israelites recognized as the king's loyal servants, and tells them to place Solomon on his mule (the equivalent of a king's white horse) and take him to the Gihon spring for the official coronation. Adonijah may have an army commander and a High Priest, but David's guard commander, esteemed priest, the king's prophet, the Tabernacle anointing oil, and the king's transport trumps it all!

Solomon becomes king, and the whole city erupts with joy! The Hebrew text says the sound "split the ground." A successor to David has finally been officially named and

enthroned! Do I have to say that Adonijah is shocked? Not more than his guests! With Solomon as the rightful king, they know what's coming their way if they continue to support the presumed king, who hadn't been anointed nor enthroned. So naturally, they run home (1:49).

Now that Solomon is officially king, Adonijah knows what that means. Most kings take out any contenders to the throne, and Bathsheba knew what was coming for her and Solomon if Adonijah had succeeded. Now the shoe's on the other foot. Adonijah runs to David's tent and grabs the horns of the altar to plead for mercy and safety. Adonijah fears for his life, and Solomon graciously spares it under one condition. Adonijah must toe the line. If he doesn't, Solomon won't hesitate to dispatch him if he tries to take the throne again.

Chapter 2 wraps up David's life with his final instructions. It's short and to the point.

"Keep God's word, Solomon, and walk in his ways. Remember the covenant he made with me, including you" (2:2-4).

"Remember Joab's sins against me, Abner, and Amasa. Settle the score for those injustices. Don't let him die peacefully (because of old age)" (2:5-6).

"Keep my promise to Barzillai the Gileadite and show kindness to his sons because he supported me when I was on the run from Absalom" (2:7).

"Keep an eye on Shimei, son of Gera, the Benjaminite. I swore to him by the Lord, 'I will never kill you with the sword.' But I didn't say nobody else would either. Don't let him go unpunished, for you are a wise man. You know how to deal with him to bring his gray head down to Sheol with blood" (2:8-9).

And with that, King David dies. He reigned over Israel forty years: he reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem (2:10-11).

A new era begins! "Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his kingship was firmly established" (2:12).

Now, just because Solomon's kingship was firmly established doesn't mean there are no more challenges. What Adonijah couldn't do by outward initiative, he tries by subversion. He brings a rather sneaky request to Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, "Now that Abishag's services are no longer needed for royal care, can I please have the beautiful

woman as my wife? Would you ask Solomon for me, please?" Adonijah's request is seemingly innocent, *except* this; even though Abishag never had sex with David (she remained a virgin, 1:4), it *looks* like she did as a concubine. That would make her a wife in the eyes of the people.

Sneaky Adonijah tries to go through Bathsheba, thinking he could mask his request as her request. But what is his real intent? Adonijah is trying to set up a familial claim to the throne by vaulting over Solomon's claim. "Yes, *you* were anointed, but I have a closer claim, being older and now the husband of the previous king's wife."

Adonijah proves that he'll just keep maneuvering and scheming for the throne, so Solomon must execute him (2:25). Done.

Because of Adonijah's sneaky move, Solomon knows he must clean David's house now. He removes Adonijah's previous co-conspirator Abiathar, the High Priest, and sends him into exile. This action is part of the Lord's far-ranging prophecy re: High Priest Eli's house in a fascinating twist. Waaaaay back in 1 Samuel 2, the High Priest named Eli refused to discipline his corrupt sons. As a result, the Lord declared He would cut off Eli's descendants from Temple service and its perks and relegate them to begging for their bread, among other horrible things (2 Samuel 2:30-33).

Having heard of Solomon's actions against Adonijah and Abiathar, Joab also seeks sanctuary at the altar in David's tent. No good. No amount of mercy can remove the sin and injustice brought by Joab's hand as a three-time murderer. As the Torah says, "Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death" (Numbers 35:31). It's justice time for Joab! And where else should blood be shed, especially guilty blood, but at the Lord's altar? A sinner must pay for their sin unless they fall on the mercy of the Lord and the Lord provides a substitute. There was no substitute to turn the Lord's wrath from Joab in this case.

Finally, it's the weasel, Shimei's turn. It's time to deal with the last issue, but Solomon doesn't execute Shimei for no cause. He leaves Shimei's execution up to the wicked man himself. Solomon addresses Shimei's past sin against David by giving him extended house arrest (2:36-37). However, after staying within Jerusalem's boundaries for three years, two of Shimei's slaves run away. Seeing that they're a high cost, Shimei figures he can travel out and back without Solomon finding out. Or maybe he thought Solomon forgot the terms of their agreement. No dice. Shimei brought evil on himself through his words – first the curses thrown at David and then his vow, which he breaks.

And with the loose ends tied up, "So the kingdom was established in Solomon's hand" (2:46).

INSIGHT

There's a saying, "It's not the amount of living in your life. It's the life in your living." This adage captures the essence of a life well-lived. The best way to live life is by God's ways. David's life could have turned sour at any time. However, even in his moments of weakness, he turned to God, and the Lord used even David's faults for good purposes. David's reign comes to an end, and Solomon's begins. David shows Solomon what is needed to be a success in the Lord's eyes. The question is whether Solomon will walk in his father's footsteps.

March 31 : Scriptures 1 Kings 3-5

SUMMARY

When I became a dedicated Christian as a junior in High School, I was amazed how the Bible “opened up” to me. The Lord’s word was pretty unengaging before I was born-again and changed by the Holy Spirit. I’d try to read it or listen to it in church services, but *blah-blah-blah*. Every once in a while, there was a glimmer of something that faintly blinked but then blinked out again.

One Saturday in November 1975, after a morning Bible study run by some wonderfully loving charismatic, on-fire Baptists, I decided to settle the matter with the Lord. I lay on my bed and gave my life to Jesus. Within days I *wanted* to read the Bible, and by that, I mean really dig into it. The Bible study leaders gave me a Bible and told me to start reading Psalms, Proverbs, and the Gospels. That was good guidance. Of course, the Gospels burst open because the Lord of the Gospels was now the Lord of my life. Jesus’ teaching began to light up and illuminate my mind. But what greatly surprised me were the Psalms and Proverbs. The Psalms lit up my emotions, and the Proverbs lit up my mind.

As I read through Proverbs, I noticed how often Solomon wrote about wisdom – its value, protection, and guidance. How did he learn that? His father, King David, told him to seek wisdom and that God was the source of all wisdom. Check these verses out.

“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, *listening closely to wisdom* and directing your heart to understanding; furthermore, *if you call out to insight and lift your voice to understanding*, if you seek it like silver and search for it like hidden treasure, *then you will understand the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding*” (Proverbs 2:1-6).

When I read these words and many like them, I followed David’s advice. I asked the Lord for wisdom. I asked it for myself and to help those around me. I was amazed at how my thinking changed. Without going into the plethora of experiences and details, suffice to say the Lord honored my request. Since then, I’ve asked for wisdom multiple times, and the Lord has blessed me in matters great and small. What James wrote is true, “Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). I did this once more when I started writing my doctorate in June 2019. I asked the Lord to grant me wisdom and guide me. As I wrote, He continually downloaded ideas, connections, and lines of reasoning

that stun me even today as I reread my work. "I can't believe I wrote this! Where did this come from?" I keep thinking. All that work was from the Lord. All I am I owe to Him.

I write this because Solomon is about to go through the same process. Solomon follows his father's advice in this chapter (1 Kings 3) and asks for wisdom. But first, the writer of 1 Kings gives us the context of Solomon's early years. Solomon marries Pharaoh's daughter to create a family alliance, the building projects that are yet to be completed (his palace, the Temple, and Jerusalem's wall), and the people are sacrificing on high places. Why were they doing that? Because the Tabernacle is in Gibeon and the Ark is in a tent in Jerusalem. There is no single place of worship established yet.

David has provided loads of materials to build the first Temple, but construction hasn't begun. So although Solomon himself is sacrificing on high places (hilltops because those are "closer" to where God/the "gods" live), he's loving God by faithfully living according to His word.

You can't say Solomon is stingy! He takes one thousand animals to the primary high place, the Tabernacle at Gibeon, and as he's sleeping, Yehovah appears to the king in a dream. Dreams are among many forms through which the Lord speaks to His people, even today (Joel 2:28; Acts 16:9).

I'm fascinated the Lord would ask such a question to Solomon. How would you answer such an open-ended question? You can tell Solomon's father trained him well. Rather than asking the Lord to satisfy his typically human desires, Solomon asks for the one thing he's been taught is most valuable – wisdom! "Lord my God, you have now made your servant king in my father David's place. Yet I am just a youth with no experience in leadership. Your servant is among your people you have chosen, a people too many to be numbered or counted. So give your servant a receptive heart to judge your people and to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of yours?" (3:7-9). What a great request from a young man who has such great responsibilities and accountability to God!

Yehovah not only grants King Solomon's request for wisdom but also the many things for which he could have asked, even a long life. However, this final grant is not without a condition. Solomon must live according to God's Davidic covenant terms (2 Samuel 7:11-14). It's interesting that when Solomon awoke, he knew this dream was from the Lord. He left the place of sacrifice (Gibeon and the Tabernacle) and went immediately to the place of worship (Jerusalem and the Ark).

The Lord promises wisdom, and the Lord delivers. We now come to the well-known account of the two prostitutes fighting over a baby boy. Both give birth to a baby boy, and one accidentally kills her child. Why is it such a big deal to fight over an infant boy? *Because a boy grows to be a man who will support his mother in her old age.* The fought-over child is a cash cow to the prostitute who smothered her son and the love of her life to the prostitute who is the birth mother. The question of who the baby belongs to was beyond Solomon's ability to answer. He needed more evidence, and Solomon's wisdom kicks in. Using the threat of killing the child, he cuts through the dispute (pun intended) to the heart of the matter, the mother's heart. Only a loving mother would be willing to sacrifice her future and life for her child's sake. Only a heartless fraud would be willing to sacrifice a life if she couldn't get her way. Solomon's intended his threat to provoke a mother's natural compassion, a compassion that would sooner give up her child than see it die. Since the one woman's child had already died, so had her compassion. That's why she could so easily surrender someone else's child to death. The birth mother, however, knew that her child was still alive. God's wisdom prevails!

Chapter 4 is one of those "not very interesting" chapters to many people, but it still is God's word, so there must be value in it, right? First, there is a list of Solomon's inner circle. We glean value by learning the men's names and job descriptions because they'll play essential roles in the future. Some of these guys are carryovers from David's administration (in italics):

- Elihoreph and Ahijah – scribes.
- Jehoshaphat – recorder.
- *Benaiah* – Army chief (replaced Joab).
- *Zadok* and Abiathar – High priest and priest.
- Azariah son of Zadok – priest.
- Azariah, son of Nathan – chief officer over the district officials.
- Zabud – priest and king's friend (chief of protocol).
- Ahishar – minister of palace and state.
- Adoniram – labor force chief.

Solomon's wisdom kicks in again. He divides the land of Israel into twelve districts and places twelve trusted administrators (deputies) to oversee their assignments. These guys will be critical when Solomon conscripts builders for the Temple and soldiers for war. Two things of note are the districts didn't follow tribal lines, and two of the men, Ben-abinadab and Ahimaaz, were Solomon's sons-in-law.

Solomon's reign extended from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean and the border of Egypt to the west (4:21).

Next, the text records the truly astounding numbers of *daily* provisions. *Daily!*

- Fine flour – 5 ½ tons.
- Meal – 11 tons.
- Fatted (stall-fed) oxen – 10.
- Grass-fed oxen – 20.
- Sheep and goats – 100.
- Deer, gazelles, roebucks, and choice fowl (a bunch to fill the menu with variety).

In addition to all this, Solomon was a fount of wisdom made manifest through his literary abilities, “Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005” (4:32). It’s sad that we only have a handful of his sayings preserved in the book of Proverbs. I wonder what else he had to say! Solomon’s God-given wisdom and intellect were so deep and profound that “Emissaries of all peoples, sent by every king on earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom” (4:34).

In chapter 5, we’re introduced to one of those kings who was deeply impressed by Solomon, King Hiram of Tyre (in modern-day Lebanon). He was the Phoenician king of the city of Tyre for 34 years and was a great friend of Solomon’s father, David. Tyre was a prosperous island city with two harbors, and it became a collection and shipping point of the cedar and cypress lumber from inland Lebanon.

When Hiram’s emissaries show up to affirm Israel’s and Tyre’s diplomatic relationship, Solomon shares his plan to build a great temple to honor Yehovah’s name. A key component for temple construction is stone, and the other is wood. Of course, Hiram is the go-to guy for cedar, so the two men strike a deal. Hiram will send cedar logs as rafts from Tyre to Israel’s coast, his team will break them apart, and Solomon’s team will transport them to Jerusalem for construction. In return, Solomon will provide abundant food for Hiram’s household. This working arrangement becomes part of their treaty, and they remain at peace.

Finally, after securing building materials, Solomon begins to enlist his labor force, and what a labor force it is!

- 30,000 laborers on a three-month shift – one month in Lebanon, two in Israel.
- 70,000 material transporters.
- 80,000 stonecutters stationed in the hills.

The stone and the wood are prepared offsite and then carried to the Temple Mount for construction staging. And with that, the Temple work will now commence!

INSIGHT

When faced with a task beyond your understanding or abilities, take a cue from Solomon. Ask for understanding, discernment, and wisdom before taking action, and trust that the Lord will be pleased that you came to Him first. The Lord can help you meet any project, challenge, or situation much easier with a simple moment of inspiration (from the root meaning “the immediate influence of God”) if we will but ask and receive.