

Solomon's Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Great. Thanks, John. We've been looking forward to this series for a little while. Solomon's a fascinating figure, and we're hoping that the next four sermons spread over five Sundays, because there's a break in the middle, will be a real help to us all.

And we thought it would be a good plan to spend just a few minutes then setting up not just this evening's sermon, but the series as a whole. As John said, who's Solomon, where does he fit into things, and why construct a series with John's wonderful alliteration called Solomon's Slide. So it's not just the W's, it's also the S's. So just a few minutes then about Solomon and where he fits and why Solomon's Slide. Well, kingship came late to Israel.

I mean, I think we'll all be. If you're familiar with the story of the Old Testament, you'll be familiar with the fact that all the nations seem to have kings, but Israel doesn't have a king.

And in fact, historically, that seems to be the case. Lots of the surrounding nations for hundreds, if not thousands of years, had had kings, and Israel wanted a king too.

[1 : 14] They didn't have a king because the Lord was their king. But it's anticipated in the law of Moses that there would be one day a king, and it's an unusual law in all of ancient literature.

There is no other constitutional monarchy, no other law relating to the king outside of the Bible. And it comes in Deuteronomy 17. So we'll just read it briefly now.

There's a block of legislation in Deuteronomy that governs... Where are all our civil servants tonight? That governs a sort of civil society and how the law courts should work and administration and so forth.

And as part of this, in chapter Deuteronomy 17, we have this law, and it begins at verse 14. When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us.

Then be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite.

[2 : 28] The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them. For the Lord has told you, you are not to go back that way again.

He must not take many wives or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests.

It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees, and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites, and turn from the law to the right or to the left.

Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. So there we have it, quite a special law concerning the rise of kingship and its role in Israelite society.

And Israel took hesitant steps towards having a king. If you know your book of Judges quite well, you'll notice there's some hesitant steps towards kingship there. And certainly the way the book of Judges ends anticipates the coming of a king as a good thing.

[3 : 55] Israel is falling apart morally. And it finishes with the words, Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. There was no king in Israel.

And when kingship finally arrives, it is with God's choice, with Saul, around the year, what, 1020 B.C.

And Saul, if you're taking a sort of X-factor, people's choice king, Saul might well have won. You know, a great strapping guy, head and shoulders over everyone else.

So maybe the kind of people's ideal king, they got what they wanted, but they didn't quite get what God finally wanted. And that came in the person of David.

So Saul's successor. Saul didn't place his son on the throne. David was anointed king, a king to be after God's own heart, as the book of Samuel has it and is repeated in the sermons of Acts.

[4 : 54] And it's David then who sort of consolidates kingship in Israel and has a son follow him onto the throne. So there is with Solomon, David's successor, a hereditary kingship.

And that's the way that we tend to think about kingship. David comes to the throne around 1000 B.C. I think that's an easy name to remember for me, David.

Easy year to remember, 1000. works pretty well. And that's a nice sort of chronological peg to hang the stories of the Old Testament on. Around 960 then is when Solomon comes to the throne as the sort of culmination establishing kingship in Israel.

Well, Solomon in many ways was a great king. Solomon had great achievements, monumental building projects. He built cities, fortified them.

He built a palace. He built famously the temple in Jerusalem. With Solomon, we have the rise of arts and literature in Israel.

[6 : 02] Many scholars think that the first court historians that wrote up the history of David's reign were the court historians of Solomon's court.

His administration was wonderful. Again, civil servants tonight. David left a great kingdom in extent, but he didn't pass on a civil service, taxation, and so on.

But Solomon implemented all these wonderful things. Exploration and trade. Ships sending out explorers and traders.

And with all of this activity in Solomon's reign, there's also, we speculate, we don't have direct evidence, but where were the scribal schools for the accountants, the diplomats, the architects that were at work doing all this activity in David's kingdom?

And of course, as John mentioned, he himself was world-renowned for wisdom, the first theme that we tackle this evening. So a lot of Solomon's reign gets a nice summary in 1 Kings chapter 4.

[7 : 15] We'll just read those verses briefly now. So it's the end of the chapter, 1 Kings 4, 29 to 34. God gave Solomon wisdom and great insight and breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Atha and the Ezraite, wiser than Haman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol.

And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005. Gotta love that number.

He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds and reptiles and fish, kind of proto-natural scientists.

And from all the nations, people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world who had heard of his wisdom. Fantastic! Fantastic!

[8 : 28] You can tell there's a buck coming, but there were problems. Perhaps, as a foreshadow of things to come, there were complications already at David's birth, at Solomon's birth.

Now, David had an affair with Bathsheba and had her husband killed. Now, the child of that union died. But in that period, David and Bathsheba married, and Solomon was their son.

Well, in 2 Samuel 12, we read the birth notice of Solomon. So 2 Samuel 12, verses 24 and 25.

Then, so this is after the death of their first child, David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her, lay with her.

She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. Solomon. The Lord loved him. And because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

Just pause for a moment on this. So this child gets a name from father and mother, Solomon. Now, to this day, scholars argue about the meaning of the name of Solomon, where it comes from.

[9 : 47] It is, in fact, the name of one of the Assyrian deities. It was the name of a Syrian king. It might mean his substitute.

That is the substitute for the dead child. Or it might have something to do with peace. You'll know the word shalom. And maybe that word is in Solomon's name.

Well, whatever Solomon's name means, the Lord's love for him led to the Lord sending the prophet Nathan with another name. And that name was Jedidiah.

Now, the did in Jedidiah is actually David's name. And it means beloved. And when you put it in that form, Jedidiah, it means beloved of the Lord.

But he doesn't bear that name. He bears the name Solomon. He comes to the throne eventually amidst conflict and a bit of real politique, knives not in the night but in the day, knocking off rivals and political enemies.

[10:52] He amasses fabulous wealth, a vast array of wives and concubines. And having had most of his reign, long reign, in peace, towards the end of his reign, he develops both personal and political enemies.

And the temple that he built for the living God is joined by a number of shrines in Jerusalem to the gods of the surrounding nations who now had their daughters as his wives and concubines in Jerusalem.

At the end of his reign, we hear the voice of a prophet. For the first time, he faces prophetic opposition. Now, this is interesting. This is the first time in Solomon's reign we've heard a prophet's voice.

There had been prophetic voices all through his father's reign. Samuel spoke prophetically. Nathan spoke prophetically. God spoke prophetically.

No prophetic word in Solomon's reign until the very end, when the end of Solomon's kingship was announced. After his death, the kingdom falls apart.

[12:00] And so we really need a new summary now to think about what's happened at the end of Solomon's reign. This comes in 1 Kings 11, verses 9 and 10.

1 Kings 11, 9 and 10. The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.

Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. So the one that at birth the Lord loved, at the end became one with whom the Lord became angry.

So this is Solomon's puzzle then. How did one of the greatest kings of Israel, who started so well, and as we'll see in a few moments with such a generous gift of divinely given wisdom, how did this king who started so well end so badly?

Solomon's slide. And so we examine Solomon's slide in four parts. As John said, wisdom tonight, worship next week, and after a break, Solomon's wealth and Solomon's women.

[13:20] It won't be the same sermon four times. But a certain pattern may emerge. And just before we consider this passage and a couple others, let's just pray once more.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for your living word. And we thank you that the word came and dwelt among us. So we pray that you would open our hearts and minds tonight, that you would direct us in your ways, in your will, and for your glory.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, on to Solomon then. And although Solomon is one of the marquee kings of Israel, I mean, if we were going to name off all the names of the kings of Israel, well, actually, this group might know all the names of the kings of Israel, but Solomon would be near the top of the list of the ones we would get.

And his wisdom is proverbial to this day in the research I did for this evening's sermon. I checked the Guardian website. And as you do, it seems that something to do with the wisdom of Solomon, about once a month, if the search was correct, appears in the pages of the Guardian.

It's a fairly current notion, even in today's society. But for all of his fame to this day, he's only named a handful of times, I mean, five or six in the New Testament.

[14:52] And his wisdom only appears once. And that is in the Gospels. In Matthew chapter 12, and it's parallel passage in Luke 11, so we maybe count those as one, some scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus asking for a sign.

And Jesus says, I'm not going to give you the sign. The only sign I'm going to give you is the sign of Jonah. But to the sign of Jonah, Jesus adds this one, and it's Matthew 12, verse 42.

The queen of the south will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom.

And now, something greater than Solomon is here. So Solomon's wisdom, and this particular instance with the queen of the south, who we know as the queen of Sheba, we'll be looking at this story in just a moment, she comes as a sign of condemnation to those who don't recognize God's servant and king in Jesus Christ.

The queen's seeking, finding, affirming, and confessing the Lord's wisdom as she sees it in Solomon condemns the sign-seeking generation.

[16:09] Solomon was not the end of the story. But Solomon is deeply, wisdom is deeply associated with Solomon. The words for wise or wisdom appear 21 times in the books of Kings, 1 and 2 Kings, that cover the whole history of Israel and Judah.

21 times. All 21 of those appear in Solomon's reign between 1 Kings 2 and 11. Solomon was the wise king.

So, in looking at Solomon's wisdom in relationship to his slide, we're going to look at three stories this evening. Solomon's dream, Solomon's judgment, and the queen, as we've just mentioned.

And in each of these stories, we'll look at them in terms of what's right there and what's wrong there. Because in each of these stories, we see something good to affirm some right thing.

And in each of these stories, if we read them carefully, listen carefully, we'll hear things that should set alarm bells ringing, things that are somehow wrong.

[17:29] And as we look through these three stories, we'll see that God blessed Solomon with a good gift, a good gift of wisdom to rule his people. Now, his, you can have with a little H or a big H, a good gift of wisdom to reign his, that is God's people.

But as we just read a moment ago in the story of Solomon's dream, a good gift of wisdom to rule Solomon's people. But it was faithfully distorted by Solomon's disobedience with destructive results for king and people alike.

So, the first of these three stories is the story of the dream, and it's the one that Solomon, that John read for us just a moment ago in 1 Kings chapter 3.

And here, our pair of right and wrong is the right picture, but in the wrong frame. So, what's right about this picture? Well, not to belabor the obvious, but Solomon asks for the right thing.

In the dream, God appears to him, ask me anything. And what he asks for is a discerning heart. You see in verse 9, so give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people, to distinguish between right and wrong.

[18:53] And right away, this tells us something about biblical wisdom. Because biblical wisdom isn't just about being smart or being able to answer riddles very cleverly.

It's about skillful living. It's about living one's life in accordance with the way God has structured the world. Skillful living.

And for a king, skillful living is that capacity to make right judgments. To have this capacity for discerning right and wrong that Solomon mentions here.

It's what he needs as a king to rule. That's right in this picture. And just to confirm this, verse 10 follows, the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

This is a good request on Solomon's part. And not only that, but the Lord adds more besides. And perhaps you noticed this.

[19:53] Because you haven't asked for long life or wealth, nor have you asked for the death of your enemies. I'm not looking at the negative side yet, but the skeptical person might say, that's because he's killed them already.

I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart. So this is good. That's the picture.

And as we generally do with the picture, we see the picture first. And if we notice the frame, we'll stand back and see the frame around it. And in this case, as we look at the frame around it, we start to see that maybe the picture is a little bit tilted.

So look back at verse 1. I should say you should have your Bibles open in front of you to 1 Kings chapter 3. We'll be spending a little bit of time in it. And it begins, as you'll have noticed, Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter.

So as the story begins, the frame around the dream, Solomon's just got married. In fact, the Hebrew here is quite compressed. It's Solomon became son-in-law to Pharaoh king of Egypt.

[21:12] That implies two things. It implies marrying an Egyptian princess, but it also implies, as the NIV has it here, forging a political alliance with Egypt.

And this is not good. Maybe you'll remember in the law we read just a moment ago from Deuteronomy, the king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them.

for the Lord has told you you are not to go back that way again. Yet as our story begins, Solomon's forged a political alliance by marriage with Egypt.

Now, Solomon's impulse and intention here is the right one. He's asking for a listening heart, but the last time we'll hear of Solomon's heart, it's a heart that's been led astray.

In the frame again, we see something good. Solomon's gone to worship. Verse 3, Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David.

[22 : 25] So that's a good thing. Except, the text goes on, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

So, in fact, he's being obedient except for this distorted worship that he's offering the living God.

Now, we're going to say more about worship next week, so I won't pause on this here, but clearly as we start on the dream then, things are not all well in Solomon's life.

Right at the other end of the story, so this is verse 15, Solomon awoke and he realized it had been a dream. So we're at the other part of the frame now.

He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the Ark of the Lord's Covenant, and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He's worshipping again now in Jerusalem, seems good.

As it finishes, then he gave a feast for all his court. We'll see a bit more about Solomon's feasting in just a few moments, but there is something a little bit incommensurate, I think, with the way the storyteller tells us that he's sacrificing one moment and having a great banquet the next.

[23 : 48] There's something a little bit incommensurate about attending to God and then immediately indulging self. Perhaps is that overreading?

Well, I think as the story unfolds, we'll see that this is part of a pattern. But this is about as good as it gets, I think, for Solomon in wisdom. This is already a high point.

It's a positive picture, although as we put the frame around it, we see there are some hints that suggest there's just something about this picture that's a little bit out of kilter.

So that's the dream. The second of the famous stories that displays Solomon's wisdom is the one that follows in 1 Kings chapter 3.

The story of a wise ruling, a judgment that he makes. And we'll read that together and then a few comments. So this is 1 Kings 3 beginning at verse 16.

[24 : 47] 2 Kings 3 Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, Pardon me, my lord.

This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby.

We were alone. There was no one in the house but the two of us. During the night, this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I, your servant, was asleep.

She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning I got up to nurse my son and he was dead. But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had born.

The other woman said, No, the living one is my son, the dead one is yours. But the first one insisted, No, the dead one is yours, the living one is mine.

[25 : 58] And so they argued before the king. The king said, This one says my son is alive and your son is dead, while that one says no, your son is dead and mine is alive.

Then the king said, bring me a sword. So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order, cut the living child in two, give half to one and half to the other.

The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, Please my lord, give her the living baby, don't kill him.

But the other said, Neither I nor you shall have him, cut him in two. Then the king gave his ruling, give the living baby to the first woman, do not kill him, she is his mother.

When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice. Well, it's a famous story, but it's also a complex story, and it's a more complex story than our translations let on.

[27 : 19] Every English translation makes adjustments to try to clarify who's speaking when, and I'd encourage you all to take a Hebrew course, but were we to read it in Hebrew, we'd find out that the identity of the woman speaking as the argument unfolds is not always clear.

And in fact, when we have in our text in verse 23, this one says my son is alive, that one says no, your son is dead. In fact, Solomon's language doesn't even distinguish.

It's literally this one says and this one says, without referring to them differently at all. So, it's, and in fact, if you are going to look on the many, read through the ink that's been spilled on this story, you will find arguments for either one of these women, however you identify them being the right mother.

So, it's a complicated story, which is perhaps fitting as the first event following the divine giving of wisdom to Solomon, the most wise king ever.

one of the things that is right and wrong in this story then. Well, here we see some right judgments, but some wrong morals.

[28 : 42] So, let's look at the right thing. What goes right in this story? And we won't be attending to all the complexities. For all those complexities, it's pretty clear what happens. Solomon gets it right, doesn't he?

Yes, he does. And these are some of the good things that emerge in this story. I mean, it begins, now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.

Now, is that a surprise? I think it's a surprise. I think it's a surprise that two prostitutes have access to the royal court for adjudicating their dispute.

But what it suggests right away is that even the most despised, and the lowest in the society have access to royal justice.

Now, prostitution in the Bible, it's pretty clear, is a negative thing. It's not a good thing, prostitution, in the scriptures. It's not quite forbidden in biblical law.

[29 : 45] We'll look at this a little bit more in just a moment. But the Bible's also clear that it arises when something goes wrong. There seems to be a recognition that the poorest and most desperate women can be driven to sell access to their own bodies if that's the only means they have to live.

And these two women, presumably the lowest of the low in Israelite society, come to the king for justice. Now, it's also very hard to tell these two apart, as I mentioned just a moment ago.

Solomon, though, is scrupulously even-handed. He doesn't play favorites. He doesn't try to get them apart. He simply, as I said a moment ago, says this one and this one.

He takes both their testimonies at face value, scrupulously even-handed. And this is just as well because, as many note, trying to get at the truth in this story by interrogating the only witnesses is going to be hopeless.

Testimony, in this case, is at best an ambiguous route to justice. You'll have noticed that the first woman who speaks makes it very clear.

[31 : 07] We were alone. There was no one in the house but the two of us. There's no witness. There's only one word against the other.

So there's only claims, to deal with no witnesses. But as one of the feminist commentators on this passage points out, in ancient texts, prostitutes are notorious and habitual liars.

And her point is that Solomon's got little chance of getting the truth by interrogating women such as these who in that society would be regarded as simply habitual liars.

And so Solomon does the right thing. He adopts a ploy which elicits the truth and the right judgment is given. All Israel hears.

This is a famous judgment and they held the king in awe. So that goes right. The right judgment is given and the poor are given justice.

[32 : 13] justice. So what's wrong with this picture? Well, there's something wrong about the morals in this picture for all of that. It's just a curious fact of the way this story is told and I think it just puts us on alert.

How many personal names did you see as we read this story? Did you see Solomon's name appear at all? In fact, it doesn't. The women are not named.

Solomon is not named. He only appears as the king, the king, the king, the king, the king. So it underscores here that we're seeing Solomon not just in his personal capacity but as the great judge king, administering justice over Israel.

And like English, Hebrew has a variety of words for prostitution. And the particular word used in this story, now two prostitutes, came to the king, is the word that's routinely used in the prophetic texts for spiritual apostasy.

When Israel is described as a prostitute, it's one who has turned away from the Lord, routinely associated with falling away and abandoning the true God.

[33 : 36] I mentioned a moment ago in biblical law, prostitution has a, perhaps not an obvious place because there isn't a law that says there shall not be prostitution.

But it's interesting what there is. Leviticus 19.29, do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

So it's clear that this is a negative thing. did you hear who the law is addressed to? It's not addressed to women. Do not degrade your daughter.

It's addressed to fathers. And there's other legislation like that about how priests do not relate to prostitutes and so on. Holiness and prostitution do not come together.

They do not work together. And as one commentator puts it, when we consider the strictures found elsewhere in the text against Solomon's own interest in women, the reader may begin to suspect that it is not purely accidental nor entirely in Solomon's favor that he's given such a setting in which to exercise his God-given wisdom.

[34 : 57] Because it's worrying then that if this is the situation for prostitution, both sides of it, that this is a sign of the lowest of the low in society, women in extremis, that in fact in his judgment he does nothing to address the fact that they're prostitutes or why they have fallen into prostitution.

And although it's the thing that elicits a true judgment, it's slightly worrying that Solomon says, bring me a sword. He has previous.

As I mentioned before, when he comes to the throne, it's amidst conflict. He has an older brother who wants to become king. And on a bit of a pretext, he has him killed.

Then David's dying words to Solomon are, make sure you kill Joab and you kill Shimei. And Solomon duly obliges in somewhat judicially suspect circumstances.

So he comes to the throne having cleaned out his political enemies. And in his first judgment after being the gift of wisdom, he says, bring me a sword.

[36 : 10] It's a little ominous, especially taken with that other worry that we have this sort of moral problem of why are two prostitutes in Solomon's court? And why, if they're there, does he not deal with the root problem?

Even the form of the conclusion just makes us pause. When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe because they saw he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

Yes, he had wisdom from God to administer justice. But the word for awe here is the word for fear. They were afraid of the king. And it's not quite like when it says he administered justice.

It's not like the servant in Isaiah. We read from Isaiah to begin the service. The one who will establish justice but not break a bruised reed or quench a flickering wick.

That's not the kind of justice Solomon does here. So, even this first expression of divinely gifted wisdom, Solomon's techniques show a lot of his old man, if I can put it that way.

[37 : 27] And he fails to grapple with the deeper problems in his kingdom. So we've had a dream, we've had a judgment. Thirdly, the third place we see Solomon's wisdom on display is the story of the queen.

And that comes a few pages over in 1 Kings chapter 10. Again, we'll just take a moment to read the story and then a couple of comments on it.

If you've got your Bible in front of you, you'll see just glancing at the page in chapter 9 that it's all about Solomon's administration, about how he's organizing the kingdom, and so on.

I mention that for a purpose you'll see in a moment. So chapter 10 begins, When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she came to test Solomon with hard questions.

Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan, with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold and precious stones, she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.

[38 : 41] Solomon answered all her questions. Nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.

Literally, it took her breath away. She said to the king, the report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true, but I didn't believe these things until I came and saw

with my own eyes.

Indeed, not even half was told me. In wisdom and wealth, you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your people must be. Interesting that the ancient Greek translation of this has how happy your wives must be.

How happy your officials who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom. Praise be to the Lord your God who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel.

Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness. And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices and precious stones.

[40 : 04] Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. Brackets. Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir, and from there they brought great cargos of almuwood and precious stones.

The king used the almuwood to make supports for the temple of the Lord and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almuwood has never been imported or seen since that day.

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

So again, there's a rightness and a wrongness in this story. And I think we see the queen of Sheba drawing the right conclusion, but we wonder if she's actually got the wrong evidence.

So it's important to see for the right conclusion that she draws, what's primary for the queen of Sheba. What has she heard? She's heard of the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord.

[41 : 19] I think that's quite significant in verse 1. And she comes to test and see for herself. And the implication that she's deeply interested, she came to test Solomon with hard questions at the end of verse 1.

And in verse 3, Solomon answered all her questions. Nothing was too hard for the king. And the implication here isn't just that these are difficult. It's harder than 2 plus 2.

It's like the square root of 2 to so many decimal places. It's that they were deep. They were perhaps hidden. And that's the kind of, it's that depth of hardness that's what's in mind in this probing that the queen of Sheba brings in her questions to Solomon.

And he responds to her. And again, we remind ourselves that biblical wisdom is more than simply being clever. It's not even about being clever, but it's about skillful living.

And so for Solomon, as we noted before, this includes royal administration. And so she not only hears Solomon's wisdom, but as you'll have noticed a few times, it says she sees it.

[42 : 34] Verse 4, when she saw the wisdom of Solomon, his palace, the food, the seating arrangements, the waiters, the waiters' outfits, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the Lord's temple.

That's what took her breath away. Well, this is those state dinners that I mentioned just a few minutes ago. His banqueting is on a completely different, this puts, you know, MasterChef just to shame.

We're on a different plane here. And she's utterly amazed. The queen of Sheba finds it so. But her conclusion is an affirmation that doesn't find its end point on Solomon, but on Solomon's God.

In verse 9, praise be to the Lord your God who's delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. In a sense, she discerns in Solomon and the Lord's gifts to Solomon, the very relationship that Nathan saw at Solomon's birth, that this was a child of favor and that God had gifted this king in a remarkable way.

And so rather than praising Solomon, she praises the Lord. She comes questioning. She comes interested. She comes curious.

[44 : 10] And it seems she leaves a believer. She knows who the true and living God is. So what's negative in this story then?

What's gone wrong? Well, it's not so much what is said is what is not said. Solomon answered all her questions and so on. But the balance of the story is about Solomon's court and Solomon's wealth rather than about Solomon's wisdom per se.

And we noted already the fact finding comes to its culmination in verse 5 with the palace, the food, the seating, the servers, their robes, the cupbearers, and so on.

So we have here something much more about his wealth and about Solomon's grandeur than about God.

Much like the queen of, much like the dream at Gibeon, the story is placed in an awkward frame as we read the brackets at verse 11.

[45 : 20] Hiram's ship's, where does that come from? Well, it comes from just before chapter 10. Chapter 9 finishes, King Solomon also built ships and Hiram sent his men, sailors who knew the sea to serve and the fleet.

So the narrator is inviting us to join the dots that there's something about the story of Solomon with the queen of Sheba that fits into Solomon's wealth generating schemes.

And there's something awkward about that in terms of Solomon's own character. And there's a final thing to notice about the queen of Sheba.

We're going to hear in the fourth part of this series about Solomon's wives. He has many, many foreign wives who turn his heart away from the Lord.

And this queen comes, she inquires and recognizes the Lord, praises the Lord, and she leaves.

[46 : 25] Is she the one that got away? How wise was Solomon? Well, our three stories then.

Solomon's dream, Solomon's judgment, and Solomon's audience with the queen of Sheba. The last mention of wisdom in the book of Kings and the history of Israel, as far as the books of Kings are concerned, comes at the end of chapter 11, as we get the notice of Solomon's death.

So 1 Kings 11, verse 41. As for the other events of Solomon's reign, all he did and the wisdom he displayed, aren't they written in the book of the Annals of Solomon?

And yet as he dies, his kingdom breaks up. Well, I think the overall exploration of Solomon's wisdom leads to a negative result.

Solomon was on this slide, and how do we understand it? I think we understand it this way. Godly wisdom without a Godward life invites God's wrath.

[47 : 39] I think that's Solomon's story in a nutshell. Godly wisdom without a Godward life invites God's wrath.

Well, what do we do with that as we try to take some stories from Solomon's wisdom? Well, when we observe that Solomon consistently confused the divine gift by putting himself in the place that God should have held, it gives us some direction to learn about Solomon's mistakes.

And here's just a few brief thoughts in closing. First of all, I think it's important to note that even though we're following Solomon's journey down the slide, that all God's gifts are good gifts.

There is no doubt and no denying in Solomon's story that this wisdom is a gift that God has given him. That's affirmed at a number of places.

Scripture's clear that whatever Solomon's natural gifts, this wisdom is a divine endowment. And Solomon's misuse of it doesn't change that.

[48 : 51] It makes me wonder how do we perceive God's gifts in others? Can we perceive God's gifts in others when it's like this?

But I think it's important just to register the point that God is at work in surprising ways. God's gifts just might be in surprising people.

Think building on that, we see a second thing, that broken people can still be instruments in God's hands. I think Solomon's not the only example of this.

Think Samson, some of the judges who actually do God's work, he was a pretty nasty piece of work himself. But that broken people can be instruments in God's hands, I think, is a sign of God's gracious mercy.

It's not only a sign of God's gracious mercy, it's a sign that something has gone wrong. And the recognition that God graciously uses broken instruments is not an invitation to complacency.

[49 : 54] At least one of the prostitutes benefited from Solomon's judgment. The Queen of Sheba, whatever they talked about, whether it was politics, accounting, or something deeply theological, she was moved by that to praise the living and true God.

So they benefited from Solomon's exercise of his divine gift. That's not a cause for complacency or to say that Solomon's exercise of his wisdom could not have much more glorified the one who gave it.

A third thing, going back to the verse we began with, Solomon's failure makes Jesus' observation even more urgent.

One greater than Solomon is here. Jesus points out how the Queen of the South, the Queen of Sheba, recognized God's wisdom in Solomon. If she recognized the Lord's wisdom in Solomon, Jesus is saying, we should recognize God's presence in David's greatest, greater son, in Jesus himself.

And I think it invites us to think about wisdom in a way that we see it elsewhere in the Old Testament. that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

[51 : 14] And I think this is the absent element from Solomon's story, from Solomon's wisdom story. If Solomon shows us that godly wisdom without a Godward life invites God's wrath, then how do we turn that into something true and positive?

It would be something like true wisdom comes in being rightly related to God and so doing his work in his ways.

And for me, that points to, well, a number of New Testament texts, but one that comes to mind in particular is the end of Ephesians chapter 2. It's Ephesians 2 verses 8 to 10.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not just Solomon received a gift from God.

Not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship. Another translation has it. We are God's work of art.

[52 : 26] It's that wisdom as skill here. We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So there is skillful living in God's wisdom, in God's kingdom. I think it has this kind of shape not in exercising wisdom with a God-less life, but in exercising wisdom in a God-word life, in a God-enabled life for His glory which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

And so we see that as Solomon's wisdom and methods in his wisdom never quite rose above the wisdom of the world, we call to mind one last verse for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God stronger than human strength.

May we learn to live in God's wisdom and God's strength. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are the giver of every good and perfect gift.

And we thank You for the gift of Your Spirit who turns us to You and turns us away from sin. We thank You for Your scriptures which hold up character so unflinchingly.

[54 : 02] And as we see the complexities of Solomon's life, Lord, we are called and invited to reflect on the complexities of our own. We confess the ways in which we have clung in our pride and selfishness to the gifts that You have given, have not exercised them rightly for Your glory.

So we pray that as You turn our lives to You, teach us to walk with Jesus and to know that all Your promises are sure, that You will enable us also to grow in wisdom as You glorify Yourself in our lives.

And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.