

1ST KINGS

Week 7, chapters 3 and 4

We concluded last week as Solomon was in Gibeon, having laid himself down to sleep after a most awesome and satisfying day, when he dreamed a dream that turned out to be a vision visited by God. The leaders of Israel had assembled to cheer and validate Shlomo's coronation as King of Israel at the remnants of Moses' tent sanctuary, on a high place, at perhaps the only generally agreed-to place of communal worship and sacrifice in the entire land. Now they were gone, headed back to their 12 tribal districts, and as Solomon watched them depart, and the heady celebration complete with fabulous numbers of priestly sacrifices and inspiring benedictions all designed to beseech Yehoveh on behalf of Israel's new leader was but a memory, he must have been pondering what lay before him tomorrow.

Shlomo was a young man of about 20 years, quite serious and dedicated to his position and responsibility before the Lord. His heart was certainly in the right place as his mind had to wonder how he could possibly govern such a disparate group of people who since the days of Joshua had divided themselves up into factions and coalitions. In addition David's conquests of foreign nations had not yet been consolidated and at the moment King Solomon's means to deal with these domestic and international matters of utmost importance were quite limited.

There is something wonderful about youthful leadership because its idealism and enthusiasm to do right has not yet been tainted by the grind and weight of the never ending demands of those who must be led but invariably resist it; nor by the ever-growing number of scars caused by failures, unintended consequences, and even by others who believe they could lead better. Solomon's heart is still tender and without calluses and thus not only open but yearning for God's leading.

Thus in 1st Kings Chapter 3 verse 5, the Lord comes to **Shlomo** in a night vision and asks him a short but profound question, the answering of which will shape the remainder of the King's life. In a mere 7 words YHWH asks Solomon the question that is inherently asked of all who come to trust Him: "Tell Me what I should give you".

Solomon follows a protocol of response that is really a prayer; and the prayer begins with thanksgiving, flows into confession, and ends with a petition for God's help. And Solomon's answer expressed a singleness of spiritual desire: he wanted to be given the ability to judge God's people according to God's justice system. He wanted to be able to discern good from bad (**tov** from **rah**) because this is at the heart of administering Godly justice. I suspect that Solomon had witnessed his father, in the final several years of his reign, let justice administer itself and the people suffered greatly from it. Recall that one of the chief stated reasons for Absalom's popular rebellion against his father was that not only had David generally quit hearing legal cases himself but he was even derelict in appointing others to do so in his stead. Solomon must have concluded that being a good shepherd over God's Kingdom was going to have to begin with administering righteous justice. And so that was at the heart of his request. In some ways his petition was as pragmatic as it was spiritually appropriate.

We may not realize it but each of us who claim Christ as Lord have already been asked that same question; I wonder how we have each answered it? Solomon gave an answer commensurate with his position, his anointing, and his responsibilities; it was a practical reply. Yet it was practical in the context of asking for the ability to carry out the divine assignment given to him by God. And I think that this, in combination with the illustration of a prayer model that consists of thanksgiving, confession, and petition is something we are meant to take deep inside of us and follow faithfully.

My point is that we were not all born to be kings or judges, so it is also not necessary that we all ask God for the gift of knowing how to administer justice. The Lord has created us each with a unique purpose; He has given each of us assignments in our lives and when that assignment becomes clear then we need to ask Him how to carry it out and for the spiritual gifts to be able to do it. Those purposes and assignments are as many as there are people; so I would not pretend to begin to list with what to pray for as pertains to each of these purposes. But what I can tell you with confidence is that petitioning the Lord to show you how to accumulate personal monetary wealth does not belong on that list.

It is with the greatest sadness that I see far too many Pastors preaching the popular and aptly named Prosperity Doctrine that asks you to do just that. They say that when the Lord asks you, "Tell Me what I may give you", you need to answer: "Money, and LOTS of it!" If there is such a thing as the wrong answer to that question, surely this is it.

Let's see what the Lord's response is to Solomon's request for wisdom to administer righteous justice.

READ 1ST KINGS 3:10 – 15

Verse 10 makes it clear just how this kind of request that is based upon God's will, and is practical for the situation, is viewed by Yehoveh: What **Shlomo** said in making this request pleased **Adonai**. And then as so often happens as we deal with God, He extends the higher wisdom that Solomon asked for even to the lesser concerns of his life, and so the Lord gives to **Shlomo** the promises of long life and of abundance. It is fascinating to me the way the Bible has the Lord responding by saying BECAUSE you made this particular request instead of asking for long life or riches, THEN I'm going to give it all to you. In other words, the result of asking God for the ability to carry out what it is He has divinely created you for is that the other things of life that most of us need or would like to have will be given as well.

As we've so often discussed in Torah Class, the Old Testament is the foundation for the New. The Tanakh sets the context for not only the events but also the meaning of terms used in the New Testament. Here we see that the key to Solomon's request is that he asks for this gift of judicial wisdom not for the benefit of himself, but rather for the benefit of those who the Lord has asked him to shepherd on Lord's behalf. Now we can more fully understand the meaning of that well known and oft spoken Christian principle:

^{CJB} **Matthew 6:33** *But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

And just so we don't think that this statement is being used out of context so that I could prove my point, here is what Messiah says in the verses leading up to this marvelous truth:

(Mat 6:24-33 CJB)

²⁴ ***No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can't be a slave to both God and money.***

25 "Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life- what you will eat or drink; or about your body- what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

26 Look at the birds flying about! They neither plant nor harvest, nor do they gather food into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they are?"

27 Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to his life?"

28 "And why be anxious about clothing? Think about the fields of wild irises, and how they grow. They neither work nor spin thread,

29 yet I tell you that not even Shlomo in all his glory was clothed as beautifully as one of these.

30 If this is how God clothes grass in the field- which is here today and gone tomorrow, thrown in an oven- won't he much more clothe you? What little trust you have!"

31 "So don't be anxious, asking, 'What will we eat?' 'What will we drink?' or 'How will we be clothed?'"

32 For it is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all.

You see, verse 33 (Seek ye first his Kingdom) is the concluding thought of our Messiah who begins the subject in verse 24 with: No one can be a slave to two masters. What is even more interesting is that Yeshua continues in verse 25 with: Therefore I tell you don't worry about your life."

In 1st Kings 3 God told Solomon that **because** he chose to be a slave to God instead of to money, he was going to add money and life. Jesus exactly paralleled (essentially merely repeating it even more eloquently) what God told Solomon so long ago. Notice that this does NOT mean that the idea of "being a slave to God" is to merely "become a Believer". Walking an aisle and being saved is not the same thing as becoming a slave to God. And that is because this entire God-principle is based on a person already being a Believer. It is the Believer, not a pagan, who must decide to choose between being a slave to God or to money, because this is not a message to non-Believers.

However, to all of this awesome promise of God to **Shlomo** there is a catch. Verse 14 says that, "IF you live in my ways", I will give you long life. In other words, the promise of long life

was conditional on Solomon being Torah obedient because “living in my ways” is immediately defined as “obeying my laws and commands”. And where else do we find God’s laws and commands but in His written Word, especially in the Torah?

Resuming in 1st Kings 3 at verse 15, Solomon awakens and remembers his dream/vision. He returns to **Yerushalayim** and immediately stands before the Ark of the Covenant (that is in the make-shift tent that David had put it in many years earlier) and offers more sacrifices at the altar in front of it.

Before we move on to the next segment of this chapter I’d like to take a moment to point out something that I think you’ll find interesting. Look at verse 13 again. There it says:

^{CJB} **1 Kings 3:13** *I am also giving you what you didn't ask for, riches and honor greater than that of any other king throughout your life.*

The key phrase is: throughout your life. The Greek Septuagint and many (though not all) of its offshoots left that phrase out for some reason. The meaning of that statement when it is included is that during Solomon’s lifetime (meaning his reign over Israel) he will be the wisest, richest king in existence. What has happened as a result of those texts that have removed that phrase is that we have adopted a saying that King Solomon was the wisest and wealthiest king of all time. And the Bible doesn’t say that, and it is doubtful that he was.

Now that God has given Solomon this gift of superior judicial wisdom, we get a story that proves he has indeed received it and has put it to practical use by solving an unsolvable dilemma.

READ 1ST KINGS 3:16 – end

What is usually forgotten in this memorable story that most Christians have heard a number of times is that these 2 **ishah** were **zonah**. That is these 2 women were prostitutes who had undoubtedly become pregnant through encounters with their customers. We are given the information that both women lived in the same house as single women. The house may have

been a tavern or inn because in that era it was common that an inn was where prostitution took place; in fact there is the greatest of literary evidence that the female innkeeper was also the establishment's prostitute.

The story is not at all complicated so we won't spend too long with it. The idea is that both of these prostitutes gave birth at approximately the same time. One of the women had her baby in bed with her, and then accidentally rolled over upon it and suffocated it. She then walked over to the other woman who was also sleeping with her infant, carefully removed the child from her arms replacing it with the dead baby. Then she walked back to her own bed with the living child belonging to the other woman.

The one whose baby had not died awoke to find this lifeless body in her arms, but upon closer inspection realized that this was not her baby at all; it belonged to the other woman who was now claiming the live infant as hers.

Let me point out something here: on the surface (especially to men or to younger unmarried folks) this kind of story may sound far fetched. Even though infrequent, we'll occasionally hear on the news of some mother whose infant has died goes to the hospital and steals a baby from the nursery to replace the one she lost. I cannot understand such a thing, but I do know that women usually have such strong mother instincts upon giving birth that when they experience that kind of tragic loss they react in ways that are hard to explain. And sometimes that reaction includes kidnapping some other unfortunate mother's newborn and then making it as her own. That is essentially what is happening here and no doubt this isn't the only case of it.

The two women get into a shouting match before King Solomon, each telling essentially the same story. The problem is compounded in that there are no witnesses since they are prostitutes and have been shunned and abandoned by their families. King Solomon sees only one way to resolve the matter and that is to do something dramatic enough that hopefully it will reveal the living infant's true mother.

So he orders that the baby and a sword be brought to him and he is going to divide the baby and give each woman half. Obviously the baby will not survive such a thing. So as Solomon raises the sword and one woman bitterly says to get on with it because it would be most fair that both women lost their babies to death. The other woman pleads with Solomon to stay his hand and agrees to give up her claim on the child and to give it to the other woman so that it would not die. Solomon's conclusion is that the true mother would not want to see her baby

die just so that both sides lose. Rather the true mother loves her child so much that she'd rather it live in the arms of another than to die in hers.

Case solved.

We need to understand the uniquely Oriental mindset at work here. First of all it was usual and customary that in a case where the ordinary judges couldn't decide, the matter was to be brought to the king who as God's representative was regarded as able to make just decisions where others could not. Second, because trading and bartering was the mode of exchange, the more clever person was usually the richer because they generally got the best of their trading partner. So especially in matters that seemed to be of the Rubik's Cube variety, when someone could outwit the other parties the clever person was viewed with great admiration. For Orientals it is the wisdom and cunning of everyday life that impresses, as is the living out of valued folk proverbs.

Thus in verse 28 that concludes this section we read:

CJB 1 Kings 3:28 *All Israel heard of the decision the king had made and held the king in awe, for they saw that God's wisdom was in him, enabling him to render justice properly.*

Let's move on to Chapter 4.

READ CHAPTER 4 all

This listing of the key officials in King Shlomo's administration is similar to the one that we saw back in 2nd Samuel 8 that listed David's top officials. It is constituted based on the make-up of his royal court from some time around the middle of his reign. We know this because 2 of the

officers mentioned had Solomon's daughters as their wives, which means that they were at least 15 years old. Since Solomon was about 20 when he was coronated it obviously cannot be that he fathered children when he was 5 or 6 years old.

In verse one the first words are that King Solomon was king over ***kol Yisra'el*** (all Israel). This is no throw-away phrase; it is making clear that Solomon was the single undisputed ruler over all 12 tribes and all 12 tribal territories. There had not been a ruler who could claim that before David (although in a certain sense Joshua might be seen as ruling over all 12 tribes) and for David it was an off-again on-again situation during his reign. There were not only the northern and southern tribal coalitions that never wanted much to do with one another (the two we have become familiar with), but also the Trans-Jordanian one that consisted of the 2 ½ tribes of Israel that lived on the east side of the Jordan River, outside of the Promise Land. These coalitions and their various alliances were in constant flux and at times the situation was utterly chaotic.

However at the end of David's reign, after at least two rebellions had been put down, and the many murders of rival leaders, Solomon inherited a comparatively stable political situation. His dismissal of one of two High Priests, and his executions of David's former military commander Joab, and one of the more infamous trouble fomenters in the land, Shimei, and of Solomon's half-brother Adonijah who had the support of many in Israel, stabilized matters further. Solomon recognized that the next step was to create wealth as a means to further stabilize his country.

We'll look briefly at 1st list we're given in verses 2 through 6. The first name given is '***Azaryah*** and he is said to be the son of ***Tzadok***. The verse ends with the words "the priest", which tends to make the meaning of these words quite difficult. Here's the thing: there are several possible interpretations of what the sense of this is, but in the end it comes down to 2 main possibilities. Either the term "the priest" is referring to ***Tzadok*** or it is referring to '***Azaryah***. If it is referring to Tzadok then '***Azaryah*** is given no title or duties. If it is referring to '***Azaryah*** then it makes him "the priest". The bottom line is that the Hebrew word for priest, which is ***cohen***, occasionally carries a different meaning than priest. In fact, if we move down to verse 5 where we are introduced to ***Zavud*** son of ***Natan***, the Hebrew word describing his position is also ***cohen***. But even the Rabbis agree for the most part that this cannot mean "priest" in the classic sense.

Rather in rare cases the word ***cohen*** means something like principal officer or chief council. Even though '***Azaryah*** as the son of the High Priest ***Tzadok*** could be called a priest due to genealogy, that is not the meaning here. Rather as the 1st name mentioned at the top of the

list, he was the principle officer in Solomon's administration. In modern terms we might call him the Prime Minister who represents the King to the people. The point is this: if we look at David's list of valiant men (his royal court) in 2nd Samuel 8, first on his list (as the most important man in his government after himself) was his military commander. In David's day the 2nd in command over all Israel was the head of the military. But in Solomon's reign the 2nd in command was a civilian politician, son of the High Priest. What we need to see is that the entire character of Solomon's reign has evolved and is worlds apart from his father, David's. David's was a military government with Israel on a constant war footing. And the warring was not only with outside foreign forces but from within in what can only be described as civil war and upheaval. Solomon however would be able to live up to his name: peace. He was not a warrior leader but rather a civil leader and diplomat.

We'll look at verse 3 for a moment because two men are there described as Scribes (although our CJB calls them secretaries). **Elichoref** and **Achiyah** are called in Hebrew **caphor**. I want to discuss this because I'm regularly asked what a Scribe is in the Bible. There are 3 words used in the Bible that seem to refer to the same office of Scribe: **caphor**, **capher**, and **sophar**. Interestingly **caphor** is Hebrew, **capher** is Aramaic and there is much disagreement over the origination of the word **sophar**. No matter; a Scribe is only difficult to explain because the duty changed and evolved so much over the centuries. In David's and Solomon's day literacy was a rare skill. Only a few could read and write and this lack of literacy included most of the royal court. Reading and writing was not usually needed because most communications were done orally. Only in royal matters such as diplomatic treaties, or in matters of commerce that involved accounting records did the written word matter that much. It is actually only in the last 200 years or so that the thought that words handed down orally have come to be considered anywhere from inferior to unreliable. No doubt precision is better in the written word than in the spoken; but context and meaning is usually better preserved and thus superior in the spoken over the written. Only the most advanced and enlightened ancient societies wrote the laws of the kingdom down; and even then almost no one could read them.

So a Scribe in Solomon's era was a person who could read and write and the King need some of those, and they needed to be loyal because very likely the King himself couldn't read or write (or least not very proficiently) so the King counted on those who wrote documents on his behalf and read diplomatic messages to him from other nations to be completely trustworthy. Otherwise they could have told him anything and he would never know the difference.

Since Scribes were literate, they also tended to be higher up on the social ladder and closer to the leadership (usually the children of government officials) so they also assumed leadership responsibilities. They weren't mere court reporters or human Dictaphone machines who were otherwise uninvolved with what they wrote. Thus often the higher officials in the royal courts were called Scribes because the title set them apart by making it clear that they carried with

them the admired and rare asset of literacy. But as the centuries rolled by, and the written word and literacy became more desired and usual, the office of Scribe changed to being the royal recorder or royal historian and the people who crafted the wording of treaties and law codes.

Even later Scribes became teachers; in some cases language interpreters and the connection with them being either aristocrats or government leaders no longer applied. Therefore the job and meaning of Scribe can only be spoken of according to the historical era they operated in.

Back to our list. In verse 4 we're thrown a king-sized curveball when we're told that both **Tzadok and Evyatar** were **cohanim** (High Priests). Recall that almost immediately after assuming office Solomon deposed **Evyatar** and banished him to his own land in the city of **Anathoth**. Frankly, only speculation can be offered about this situation but one thing is clear: there is no way that if **Evyatar** was considered a pariah or his name would not have been included. This is probably a matter of respect and honor that he is listed. Likely even though he was no longer part of **Shlomo's** inner circle, he still maintained a following of loyal supporters and was considered a wise and learned and pious man; just more or less retired from official duties.

In verse 5 we have mention of **Natan**; my only comment here is that this is NOT David's prophet **Natan** but someone else. Further the '**Azaryah** who is mentioned is another and different '**Azaryah** than the one mentioned in verse 2 who is Solomon's right hand man. This is a good time to explain that in ancient times as now, names tended to go in cycles; they would become popular and lots of parents would name their children using the currently popular names; and then they'd fall out of favor and a new set of popular names would arise. This is why the Bible can become confusing as to names because most of the time only a single name is given and the family name is left out.

The last name we'll discuss because of its special interest is **Adoniram** and this is because he was in charge of the **mac**, which is Hebrew for "tribute". However in this era tribute tended to consist primarily of two things: field produce and human laborers. At the beginning of Solomon's reign forced labor were usually captured foreign slaves, or at times Hebrews who were being punished. To be clear: **Adoniram** was not a tax collector; in many ways he was a taskmaster of work crews. Now such a thing was generally hateful to the Israelites, and so not too many Israelites found themselves subject to this. But later in Solomon's reign, as he drew away from God and more interested in establishing a legacy of infrastructure in Israel, he began to "tax" normal everyday Israelites by requiring that they show up for forced labor to build Solomon's grand building projects.

We'll move to the next list of people in chapter 4 next week, and this list has considerably more significance than meets the eye.