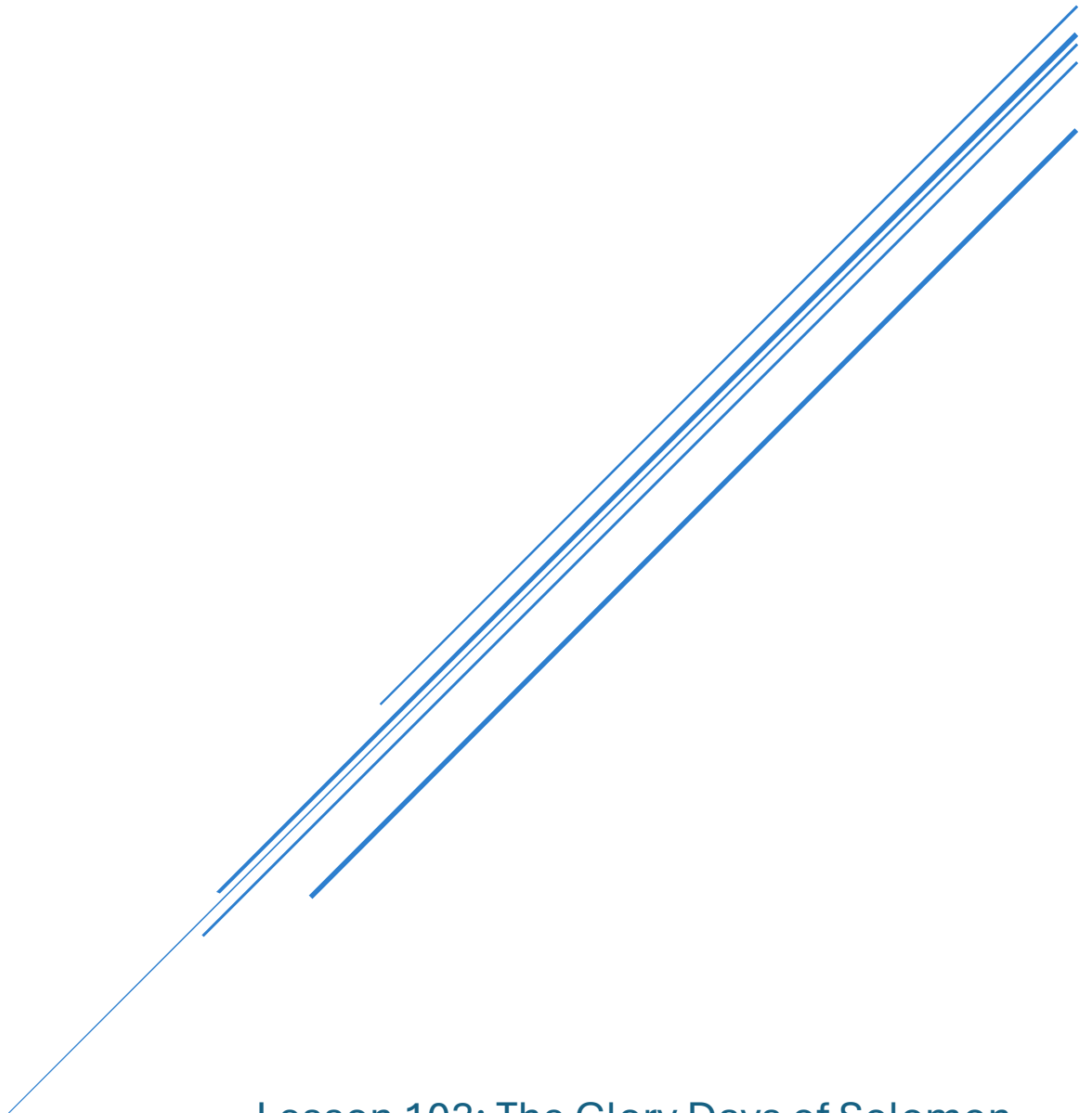


THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding God's story, Jesus' importance, & our place in God's kingdom plan



Lesson 103: The Glory Days of Solomon
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Introduction

Our last lesson explored Solomon's official coronation as the king over Israel. David, his father, gave final charges to Solomon then died. Solomon's first actions were to deal with the primary enemies of David, since that meant they were enemies to Solomon's stability as the king. We have already seen hints that Solomon is wise, perhaps beyond his years. In this lesson we will see that his wisdom will become great since God will give him special wisdom.

With the kingdom consolidated under his kingship, Solomon now worries about how he can keep it going because he is young and inexperienced. The author of 1 Kings shows us how God stepped in to assist Solomon with his monumental task.

Solomon's Marriage Alliance with Egypt

1 Kings 3:1-2

The author of Kings records that one of Solomon's early actions was forming an alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt. The translation in the New American Standard Bible is that Solomon "formed" a marriage alliance. The literal Hebrew wording would read more like "he made himself a son-in-law to Pharaoh." This may sound very strange to us today, but in Solomon's day this was nothing unusual. One of the more common and lasting ways to form a strong alliance with another kingdom was through marriage. We are not used to arranged marriages in the West, but in the Ancient Near East, a king's daughter could become the key to a peace alliance. She could be given over to another king per his request as part of an agreement.

The theory behind this was it would in a sense force a long-term peace that has a high chance of sticking because not only have the two kingdoms agreed to terms, but now the two kings will quite literally share a family together.

Solomon brought his new wife, Pharaoh's daughter, to the city of David (Jerusalem) and the author uses this to introduce Solomon's building projects he accomplished as king: the new palace, the Temple, and defense walls of Jerusalem.

This move by Solomon is interesting because it leaves open for debate whether this marriage alliance was appropriate or not. On the one hand, some Bible commentators point out that for Solomon to pull off this kind of marriage alliance was brilliant on his part. Egypt was a super power for that day, so they argue that this is another evidence of Solomon's natural wisdom and charisma. He may be young and inexperienced, yet he was somehow able to forge a powerful peace alliance with what would have been a

country like the United States for their day. Not only an alliance, but Solomon was able to take the powerful Pharaoh's daughter to be his wife.

On the other hand, some see this move by Solomon as his first of many sinful choices that began his downfall. Deuteronomy 7:1-6 says that when Israel inhabits the land of Canaan, they were not to intermarry with them. The warning was the Canaanites would cause Israel's children to turn away from following God and serve false idols.

Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 17:14-17 God gives instructions for a potential king if God so chooses to appoint one. Within these instructions God says the king is "not to acquire many wives for himself, so that his heart does not turn away..." (Deut 17:17).

Do you think Solomon was wrong or ok to marry the princess of Egypt?

In my opinion, this situation is not as clear to answer on the first look. The wording of the prohibition in Deuteronomy 7 seems to specifically only refer to the Canaanite nations as under the prohibition for Israel to intermarry with. God says it is when they enter the Promised Land, they are to drive out the Canaanite peoples and not intermarry nor form covenants with them. Does this suggest that Israelites could intermarry with non-Canaanite Gentile groups? I am honestly not sure, but I think the question is open for discussion.

We must be careful to not misread Deuteronomy 7 as imposing a law on Israel that Israelites could only marry other Israelites. Deuteronomy 7 only calls by name the Canaanites like we just said. Furthermore, there are a handful of Jews who intermarried with Gentiles and God seems to have honored those marriages.

Moses married a Cushite woman. This caused an issue with Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12. They begrudged Moses as the leader over them all, yet Moses married a non-Jew. In Numbers 12 we see that God disciplines Miriam for her complaint about Moses' non-Jewish wife. Which suggests that God had no problem with Moses marrying a non-Jew.

Someone may object that since Moses married her before the law in Deuteronomy was handed down, that he got a pass. However, Rahab was permitted to join the people of Israel and married a Jewish man (Joshua 6:25; Matt 1:5). She is even listed in Jesus' genealogy!

Also, Ruth was a Moabite woman. The Moabites were bitter enemies of Israel and under the condemnation of God from Joshua's conquest. However, Ruth was wife to a

Jewish man. After her husband died, she chose to join Israel and become one of them. She later married Boaz (a Jewish man), and through their marriage Ruth became part of the family tree of Jesus too (Matthew 1:5).

I believe examples like these show us that God did not have a blanket no exceptions ban on Israelites marrying non-Israelites. It seems the ban on intermarrying had more to do with making sure Israel did not willfully intermarry with the godless pagan people groups so that they lose their faithfulness to the Lord.

Perhaps God was ok with Jewish/Gentile mixed marriages, provided that the Gentile converted to Judaism and sought to become part of the covenant of God's people and follow His ways. But for a Jew to marry a non-Jew and there be no spiritual conversion on the part of the non-Jew was not permitted.

This brings us back to Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter. In 1 Kings 3:1, we are not given a verdict by the author as to if Solomon's actions were good or bad. However, later in 1 Kings 11, the author directly says that Solomon's intermarriages were sinful. 1 Kings 11:1 says, "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, *and* Hittite women."

This is painfully clear that Solomon's marriages were sinful, including his first one to the princess of Egypt. What made his marriages wrong is these foreign women must not have wanted anything to do with Yahweh and His law. They maintained their pagan worship practices while married to Solomon, and in the end they pulled his heart away from God.

The reason I took time to go through this discussion is I find it interesting that in 1 Kings 3, God never reprimands Solomon for marrying the princess of Egypt. In fact, God seems to honor Solomon for his faithfulness and grants him a wish request. 1 Kings 3:3 says "Solomon loved the Lord," suggesting he was faithful, but we have just seen that his marriage was against the Law of God.

Any thoughts as to why God was silent on Solomon's marriage to the Egyptian princess?

Solomon's Wisdom

Solomon Worships

1 Kings 3:2-4

The Temple has not been built yet, so worship to God was not yet centralized out of Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Jews were offering sacrifices at various places through Israel called “the high places.” These were elevated locations where altars were placed to carry out the sacrifices per the Law. God did not have a favorable view of them, since He wanted Israel sacrificing only around the Tabernacle altars, but it seems God let it happen for a season. After the Temple was built, God expected the Jews to faithfully only worship at the Temple and the high places became a sinful snare to the Jews.

In fact, you can hear the tone in verse 3 that Solomon was faithful to the Lord except for one thing... he sacrificed at the high places. Solomon goes to Gibeon to sacrifice at one of the more prominent and majestic high place altars. He engaged in worship and sacrifices that were clearly fit for a king. He sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings.

God's Offer, Solomon's Request

1 Kings 3:5-15

God appeared to Solomon in a dream and offered to grant him any request. Verses 6-9 records that Solomon asked for wisdom to be a wise and just king. Solomon is nervous because he is young and inexperienced, yet he has been given an immense task to lead God's people. He doesn't want to mess it up. He asks that God endow him with great wisdom to govern rightly for God's people and judge fairly in all matters.

God grants Solomon's request. In fact, God says He was pleased with Solomon because he could have asked for fame and fortunes, yet he asked for an attribute that would help him lead God's people. This shows us that Solomon already had reasonable wisdom. God said, “Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you” (1 Kings 3:12).

Additionally, God said He would also give Solomon what he did not ask for, honor and wealth. God would even materially bless Solomon's reign to the degree that there will not be any other king like him in his days. God reminded Solomon that if he will obey God's Law, walk according to God's ways, “as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.” (1 Kings 3:14).

Solomon woke from the dream and worshipped God with more sacrifices before the ark of the covenant at the Tabernacle.

Solomon's Wisdom Displayed

1 Kings 3:16-28

The author gives us an example instance of Solomon's new divinely gifted wisdom. Two prostitutes who shared living quarters together come before the king. These two women gave birth to their own children, and they all lived together in the house with no one else involved. The woman speaking to Solomon accused the other woman of stealing her baby and claiming it was her own. The other woman's son died in the night because she laid on him. In the middle of the night she took the other woman's living son from the bed and replaced him with her dead son's body.

The accusation was that the living son was the son of the mother who was talking to Solomon but that the other woman stole him. This case was she-said vs. she-said with no real evidence. Solomon's solution was to cut the living child in half and give each half to the women. But the woman whose child was the living one said to Solomon, "Pardon me, my lord! Give her the living child, and by no means kill him! (1 Kings 3:26). But the other woman wanted the child to be cut in half anyways so that he would belong to neither of them.

This gave Solomon his answer. "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him. She is his mother" (1 Kings 3:27).

How could Solomon know for sure which woman was the child's real mother?

This event launched Solomon's fame throughout Israel. "When all Israel heard about the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, because they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice" (1 Kings 3:28).

Solomon's Vast Kingdom & Wisdom

1 Kings 4:20-34

This section gives a summary look at Solomon's great kingdom reign, his power, and his wisdom. God blessed Solomon with peace, expansion, and success. Verse 20 says

“Judah and Israel *were* as numerous as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance; *they* were eating, drinking, and rejoicing.” This suggests that the times under Solomon were joyful and full of peace. Solomon’s reign as king was unlike any other time in Israel before him. There were no Philistine raids, no enemies at the gates trying to take over, and no one throwing a revolt against him. Israel could be a nation that builds itself into a glorious era since they are not busy with warfare or famine.

Solomon used his wisdom to organize the territories and his government in a highly efficient manner. Verses 21-24 give examples of how vast and rich Solomon’s kingdom was. He established districts with deputies over them to administrate his government throughout the land. He had what we would call tax reform for our day. He set up an efficient tax system that was able to permit prosperity among his people and supported his growing government.

Verses 22-23 give an example of how much provisions were required to supply the government for one day. 231 cubic feet of flour, 462 cubic feet of meal, 10 fat oxen, 20 pasture oxen, 100 sheep, and other animals.

“For he was ruling over everything west of the *Euphrates* River, from Tiphshah even to Gaza, over all the kings west of the River; and he had peace on all sides surrounding him. So Judah and Israel lived securely, everyone under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:24, 25). These verses further summarize the glorious days Israel enjoyed under Solomon’s reign.

“Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore” (1 Kings 4:29). Verses 30-34 summarize that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people in the east and in Egypt. His fame was known to all the surrounding nations. He wrote proverbs and songs. Verse 33 even indicates he studied what we would call today, the sciences. We would have called him an arborist and even a biologist. “*People* came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom” (1 Kings 4:34).

Conclusion

The era of Solomon’s reign was unlike any before him and no king after him ever touched the peace and prosperity of Solomon’s era. Solomon’s influence extended far beyond the borders of Israel. He was living proof for his day that God had truly fulfilled His promises to grant His people rest from their enemies in a land of their own. Solomon ruled with justice and wisdom on levels unlike any before or after him.

Unfortunately, Solomon was not the Savior. He was not the One Israel needed to bring eternal peace and salvation. As we keep reading Solomon's story, we see he also is a sinner in need of a Savior. After the times of Solomon, Israel will never again know glory days like his and they will always long for the Coming One, the Son of David, to make things right again.



