

# Succession | Good News from Bad Kings

## Solomon, The Wise

First Kings 3.16ff; First Corinthians 1.30-31

3.10.23

*Then two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him. <sup>17</sup> The one woman said, "Oh, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. <sup>18</sup> "It happened on the third day after I gave birth, that this woman also gave birth to a child, and we were together. There was no stranger with us in the house, only the two of us in the house. <sup>19</sup> "This woman's son died in the night, because she lay on it. <sup>20</sup> "So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead son in my bosom. <sup>21</sup> "When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, behold, he was dead; but when I looked at him carefully in the morning, behold, he was not my son, whom I had borne." <sup>22</sup> Then the other woman said, "No! For the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son." But the first woman said, "No! For the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son." Thus they spoke before the king.*

<sup>23</sup> *Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son who is living, and your son is the dead one'; and the other says, 'No! For your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one.'" <sup>24</sup> The king said, "Get me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. <sup>25</sup> The king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other." <sup>26</sup> Then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king, for she was deeply stirred over her son and said, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him." But the other said, "He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!" <sup>27</sup> Then the king said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him. She is his mother." <sup>28</sup> When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice. (1 Kings 3.16ff)*

<sup>1</sup> *Cor. 1.30-31* *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."*

**Last year, during the Fall Season, we concluded a long look** at the life of King David. Picking up where we left off, we now look at the Son of David and the succession of kings that follows in Ancient Israel's period of the Monarchy (about 1000 BC – 600 BC). We'll try to back-fill the story of this historical stage of Israel's history as we go.

This Son of David who succeeds him was born to David's ill-gotten wife, Bathsheba; that son's name is Solomon.

If you've ever heard of Solomon you know that he's known for his wisdom – the "*Wisdom of Solomon*" (a phrase still heard in modern conversation). So, I'd like to think about wisdom today – wisdom in the age of information. I think we all have a sense that while data are everywhere and knowledge is accessible like never before in human history but wisdom seems to be in short supply.

The ability to convert knowledge into craftsmanship or skill, to apply truth to real-life issues is very different from gathering facts from a search-engine. This is what the Bible has in mind when it uses the word, wisdom. It's discernment and powers of analysis; it's insight into whatever the field of endeavor – whether automotive repair or teaching or parenting or ruling a nation. Wisdom includes emotional intelligence and perceptiveness in matters of truth, beauty and goodness whatever the field.

Our nation and our world desperately NEED wise men and women in positions of service and leadership both individual and institutional. Wisdom is rare and especially valuable.

AND the Bible agrees with that. The writings of Solomon himself – many of the *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Solomon* extol the value, cost and desirability of wisdom. AND while Solomon was unrivaled in wisdom, somehow wisdom wasn't enough, and Solomon's life ends in both remarkable achievement AND disappointment.

Let's re-enter this period of history looking at:

- 1) Succession – the age of ALMOST
- 2) The Wisdom of Solomon
- 3) How to Approach Wisdom in Our Age

The Monarchy finds ancient Israel finally established in the Land. Jerusalem is now the capital. Israel's enemies now recede from the story. God has set up His King, David and God made gigantic promises to David and his lineage. The stable monarchy will ensure economic and military prosperity for generations. Solomon, as we hope to see next week, will get right to work, building on his father's success – he'll build the palace, the walls and the Temple.

He will rule with wisdom and the people will find real comfort and peace in the reign of a wise king. But as much as this book is about kings it's just as much about prophets – there are ten prophets who speak to the kings.

As David is passing off the scene, with the prophet Nathan by his side, David's other son, Adonijah, the eldest remaining son, is set to take the throne. Nathan sees that this is a mistake. He rouses Bathsheba to say, "Hey, I thought David promised to put YOUR son on the throne – NOT the son of Haggith (Adonijah) but the son of Bathsheba, Solomon. But the eldest is rallying support. He's announced publicly that HE, Adonijah is king!"

So, Bathsheba and Nathan (the prophet) respectfully confront the bedridden David and HE RALLIES to put Bathsheba's son on the throne. And the tide turns... Adonijah is exposed as the usurper... But Solomon takes pity on him and doesn't put his half-brother to death.

Then David charges Solomon – it sounds a lot like Moses' charge to Joshua. Solomon is the new Joshua come to establish Israel in the Land (*establish* repeated 4X in CH 2).

But David tells Solomon, “Hold on, Son! Not so fast! ‘Clean up on aisle 7’! You have to deal with some of my old enemies.” And Solomon does what he has to do. He visits the death-penalty on a few traitors and enemies of the state. Even Adonijah who shows that he still plans to take the throne from his younger half-brother – Adonijah has to be executed. God establishes Solomon (4x in CH 2).

And then the Lord of Israel comes to Solomon in a dream and gives him *carte blanche*, a blank check, “Ask of Me and I will give you whatever you want.” Like a genie from a lamp... what would you ask? (I know three more wishes!)

And Solomon centers himself – remembers that David was given “HESED” – that Hebrew word meaning a promise that God will fulfill – a covenant that God would bring to pass – “I know You have shown great HESED to Your servant David... We’re special because YOU chose us... So, I just want to... (Well, here’s the quote:) *“Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people - too many to be numbered or counted. So, give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to rule this great people of Yours?”* (1 Ki. 3.8-9)

And God was pleased with that request. God said, *“You didn’t ask for long life, wealth, revenge, but discernment to know justice. So, now I’ll give you what you asked and everything else too.”*

And Solomon, “returned to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the Covenant”. He was the first man to “stand” before the Ark (Leithart; p. 44) And he worshiped God and God made Solomon the wisest of all human beings.

And then immediately that God-given wisdom is put on display when two prostitutes stood before the young king looking for justice. Solomon stood before the Ark of the Covenant and now two harlots stand before him. (comp vv. 15 & 16)

One unnamed woman apparently rolled over on her baby and the child suffocated and being a single woman, that son was not only beloved but also her retirement plan. So, she acts fast and switches babies, and the other woman is, at first, overwhelmed by grief and then by anger and disgust when she sees her three-day-old infant in the arms of the other woman. But the other woman says, *“NO! The living one is MY son, and the dead one is YOUR son!”*

Solomon listens carefully (which is WISE...and loving) and then he retells the story making certain that he’s accurate in all the details. Then he simply (and famously!) demands, “Get me a sword.”

And when he threatens to divide the child in two, the real mother freaks then speaks! Verse 26 is the climax of the story and says, (quote) *“And the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king for she was deeply stirred over her son....”* That word, “deeply” in the Hebrew is often translated “compassion” but it comes from the word “רַחֵם” i.e. WOMB. He appealed to her deepest motherliness, her womb. And the womb did NOT disappoint! It moved her to say, “I’d rather place this son of mine for adoption than have him divided and dead!”

Then the other woman also showed her hand – misery loves company: *“If I can’t have a living son then neither will you.”*

The king used NOT LAW – but love to bring the truth to light. And *“When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.”* (28)

Everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief as if to say, *“We have a wise king and NOW all is well – we’ll have it good; we’ll know peace, justice, strength, rest, shalom!”* And they did! A wise king, a good government is... GOOD!

And this was Solomon’s first public display of wisdom and let’s face it... it’s a little strange.

How do powerless prostitutes get in to see the Monarch, the King of Israel? It reminds me of another Son of David who told the important people of His day, *“Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.”* (Matt. 21.31)

Think too of all the archetypes in the little court case. Two women in an argument – like Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, Bathsheba and Haggith, the Lady Wisdom and the Woman Folly, in Solomon’s *Book of Proverbs*, right through to the end of the Bible: The Whore of Babylon and The Bride of Christ in *The Apocalypse*. Women Rivals!

Think of two sons – Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Adonijah and Solomon, the two Prodigal Brothers (Luke 15).

Think of the sacrifice of a son as Abraham raises the knife over the Child of Promise (Gen 22) and think of the Mother of Grief herself, whose Son, the Son of David, would reveal the hearts of many, the woman who heard from that strange man in the Temple as she presented her infant Son, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, *“Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed -- and a sword will pierce even your own soul-- to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”* (Luke 2.34-35)

The woman in Solomon’s Court saw her son spared and returned to her, but later, Mary the Virgin, had her Son taken from her and He was NOT spared, but crucified... And as we saw last week, He was indeed pierced, divided, broken and given to us as the Bread of Heaven.

And like the true mother in Solomon’s Court, Mary the Virgin, received her Child, the True Son of David, back from the dead so that she could say with Solomon’s plaintiff, *“the Living One is my Son.”* He, Jesus Christ, says, *“Don’t be afraid; I am the first and the last, the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”* (Rev. 1.17-18)

And as Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, haunts the shadows of today's story, we're reminded that whereas Solomon, an Anointed King (a "meshiah melek" (מְשִׁיחַ מֶלֶךְ)), Solomon was wise but Jesus Christ IS Wisdom Himself.

We'll see that as much as the people wanted to put their trust in Solomon and his matchless wisdom... as much as Solomon wanted wisdom and as much as it served him and the people in his day, still, the vessel was weak; Solomon couldn't handle it. Wisdom is a gift from God but it's not God Himself and can't be the Source of Rest we want and need... i.e., UNTIL, Wisdom becomes a Person: *"Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption..."*

Jesus Christ IS the Mind of God, the Logos, the Logic, the Word of God expressed as a Person. Jesus Christ is the Word, *the Wisdom of God made flesh who dwelled among us*. And when we see that, when we believe Him and trust who He is and what He's done, we begin to see the world in a new and wonderful way. We start making decisions NOT simply on the basis of "What Would Jesus Do?" (that's NOT a bad question but it's Law, not Love, not grace – in fact it CAN be crushing because it's an example we really can't follow)... but beyond, "what WOULD Jesus DO?", when we ask, "WHAT DID JESUS DO?"... and how does THAT inform me as I make daily decisions? – THEN, Jesus Christ becomes to us *"wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."*

I see myself as a big sinner and Jesus Christ as a Big Savior who saw me in my distress and lostness and guilt, as desperate and hopeless as that prostitute who lost her child – powerless to resuscitate him – I am THAT powerless to bring myself to LIFE... I didn't even know I was dead and also somehow opposed to God – I was dead but also like Adonijah the Usurper: I wanted the throne, to rule my life (and YOURS!) and the world as I saw fit.

But God became flesh... Jesus Christ, the Greater Solomon (Matthew 12.42) Jesus Christ, the Anointed King, came as God's Word to me. He lived IN MY PLACE. He died under the penalty of my sin and my guilt FOR ME. He loves people like you and me and other prostitutes and sinners. He gives us audience and actually listens to us. He knows our stories.

And those truths begin to INFORM my experience, when the work of Jesus applied to my heart/life by God's Spirit becomes the interpretive lens through which I see the world and make wise decisions.

For instance, because I'm forgiven and adopted and deeply, compassionately LOVED by God... because the Holy God sees me as righteous (the record of Jesus Christ has been attributed to me) – that makes me secure and confident as I deal with other people. It dulls the anxiety and the intimidation I feel around other people.

And because I'm a real sinner – and probably a lot worse than I THINK I am – that keeps me from looking down on people, even notoriously bad people. It informs me that I can spend time with unimportant people who can't help my social status or my job prospects.

The Wisdom that Jesus Christ IS opens up a new economy for me. Things the world counts as foolish as a friend who told me he and his wife are leading a Bible-study at a home for adults with profound physical

and mental disabilities – through the Jesus-Wisdom-Lens – that becomes a really good and safe investment. Teaching English to immigrants who will never repay you, becoming skilled in your work NOT simply to get more money/stuff but because our King is making all things new, the way I look at marriage, singleness, recreation, art, humor, all of life is different. It's a new way of being human. It's wisdom.

And it's utterly realistic. What I mean is: all the good gifts of God are to be enjoyed WITH HIM but not instead of Him. As George Herbert so beautifully put it – “But keep them with a repining restlessness” – God has endowed us with so many gifts (like Wisdom and Häagen-Dazs *Rum Raisin*) BUT only He HIMSELF and none of His good gifts can give us true, lasting satisfaction and rest.

When Wisdom comes among us, He puts it plainly: *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I (only I) will give you rest.”* (Matt. 11.28-30)

## Q U O T E S

When God at first made man,  
Having a glass of blessings standing by,  
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.  
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,  
Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;  
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,  
Rest in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said he,  
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
So both should losers be.

“Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness;  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to my breast.”

-- George Herbert (1593–1633), “The Pulley”