

19 The Life of Solomon

Solomon was the son of Israel's greatest king: King David. Solomon was king over Israel for 40 years. During his reign, the nation of Israel reached the height of its power and influence over the ancient world.

The gift Solomon asked for

The life of Solomon is found in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Solomon was only young when he became king, and like most of us, he was not sure how he could be king over God's people. In a dream, God asked Solomon what he wanted. Solomon could have asked for many things: power, long life, riches, victory over his enemies. But what did Solomon ask for? He asked for wisdom.

What is wisdom? It is more than being clever. Solomon wanted God's help to solve the problems that his people would have. He wanted to know what was the right thing to say at any time. Now usually, such wisdom only comes to people who are older. But Solomon wanted the wisdom to be with him as a young man.

God was very pleased with Solomon's answer. God would give him the wisdom he asked for, and, if Solomon stayed true to God, then God would give him more power and riches than any king who had gone before. (2 Chronicles 1:7)

The test of Solomon's wisdom

King Solomon's gift of wise thinking and judging was tested soon after. Two women came to him with a problem. They lived together and each had a baby the same age. While she was asleep, one woman rolled onto her baby. The baby died. She then took the other sleeping woman's baby and put her dead child in its place. When they woke up in the morning, both women said that the living baby belonged to them. They went to the king with their problem.

After hearing the problem, Solomon told his servant to bring a sword and cut the living child in two, so that each mother could have half a baby. The real mother was very upset, and told the king that she would rather give her child to the other woman than have it killed. The woman who had stolen the child thought that to divide the baby was a good idea.



Solomon knew that only the real mother would not want her baby to be killed, and so gave the living baby to her.

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had made; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice. 1 Kings 3:28.

When Solomon was king, Israel reached its greatest power. There was plenty of money for everyone. No one was in need. Everyone had a piece of land, and there were no enemies around. It is said that while Solomon was king, he made gold and silver as common as stones. He made cedar wood as common as the sycamore wood.

Solomon had 12 governors (or managers) that helped him rule the country. He brought the tribes of Israel together, and he therefore changed the way things had been before. Before this, each tribe was ruled by the local elders (the older people).

The building of the temple

King David, Solomon's father, had wanted to build a temple for God in the city of Jerusalem, but God had said "no!" However, while Solomon was on the throne, Israel enjoyed a long time of peace. God chose Solomon to build the Temple at this time. King Hiram of Tyre offered to help Solomon with the building, and sent his workers and beautiful timber from the forests of Lebanon. In return, Solomon paid Hiram in wheat, barley, oil and wine. It took seven years to build the Temple. It gave the people of Israel a place to worship God. When the Temple was finished it was opened for worship, with special furniture being carried into it. The people celebrated with music and singing. They praised God saying, "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever." (2 Chronicles 5:13) Then the glory of God filled the Temple.

If you would like to read the prayer that Solomon offered to God when the Temple was opened, please look at 1 Kings 8:22.

King Solomon and his kingdom were famous in the ancient world. The Queen of the country of Sheba (the place we know as Ethiopia) came to visit Solomon. She asked Solomon very difficult questions, but Solomon was so wise that he could answer them all. When the Queen of Sheba saw all the wonderful things in the palace and in the kingdom, she said how much God must love Israel, to give them such a wonderful land. You can read all that she said in 1 Kings 10.

Solomon was also a writer, and together with the students in Israel, he brought all the writings of Israel into a single book. The early part of the Old Testament in the Bible was put together by Solomon. Solomon wrote three books of poetry: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

Solomon strays from God

God had set down some rules that the kings of Israel had to follow. The rules were:

A king was not to have lots of chariots and horses

A king was not to have lots of wives

Sadly, Solomon did not obey this. He had lots of horses and chariots, even though he didn't really need them. Solomon also had many wives. He married women from many countries around Israel so that these countries would not attack Israel. The Bible tells us that Solomon had about 1000 wives! He must have had hundreds of children, many that he probably never knew.

Many of these wives came from outside Israel, and they worshipped different gods. Soon, Solomon started to worship these gods instead of the God of Israel. Solomon's many wives led him into idol worship and he even built temples to these idols. God was angry with Solomon. God said that because of his wickedness, the kingdom would be taken from Solomon's son, and divided.

So while Solomon started off very well, we find that at the end of his life, the kingdom of Israel was not as strong. After Solomon died, there was a split in the kingdom of Israel. There was the northern kingdom made up of 10 tribes called Israel, and the southern kingdom made up of two tribes called Judah. Solomon's son was king over Judah.

Conclusion

So what can we say about Solomon? He was a very wise king. He wrote and did many things for God and his people. But his wives took him away from God, and God punished Solomon and his people. Never again did Israel become as great.

But there is a day coming soon when Jesus Christ will be king of the whole world. He is wiser than Solomon, and he will bring the Kingdom of God. It will be a wonderful place, and people will never die. They will never be sick, they will never be hungry. There will be no more war, only peace. We want to be there, and we want you to be there too.