

1 Kings 3

Introduction

A. Solomon's love for the LORD (3:1-4)

1. The first two verses serve as an introduction to our passage and mention two things (READ 3:1-2):
 - a. The first is, Solomon formed an alliance with Egypt (1):
 - 1) As was common in the ANE, this was done through an arranged marriage to the pharaoh's daughter (the Law did not forbid this, only marrying Canaanite women)
 - 2) Egypt was much smaller and less influential than Israel, so this wasn't so much a peace treaty as it was a trade agreement
 - b. The second is, Israel was still offering sacrifices at the high places (2):
 - 1) This could be a reference to pagan high places and Israel's participation in idolatry:
 - a) This is certainly the most common way the phrase is used in the OT, and throughout the rest of 1 & 2 Kings
 - b) This is something Israel began to struggle with the moment they entered the land and was an ongoing problem throughout their history
 - c) However, most scholars believe that idolatry was rare or even non-existent during David's reign and first couple decades of Solomon's reign; this seemed to be the case as we studied 1st and 2nd Samuel
 - 2) So, another possibility is that the "**high places**" referred to here weren't places of idolatry, but regional worship centers dedicated to God:
 - a) Prior to the temple being built and having a central place to worship, it appears the Israelites built their own high places to present their sacrifices to Yahweh
 - b) We actually see an example of this in 1 Samuel 9:11-14 (READ)—Samuel's involvement and blessing at the sacrifices suggests God's acceptance
 - c) We will see another example in a minute: Gibeon, where the tabernacle and altar were, is referred to as "**the great high place**" and the LORD accepts Solomon's sacrifices there
 - d) It appears that God permitted (tolerated?) this as long as:
 - It didn't take place at a Canaanite high place (the ones that should have been torn down)
 - It didn't involve idol worship or practices related to the pagan religions
 - And, only up until God established a central place for worship which was now complete in the temple at Jerusalem (READ Deuteronomy 12:1-5)
 - c. It's hard to know which option is more probable, but I lean toward the second because of the explanation the author gives in 2b: "**because there was no house built for the name of the LORD until those days**"
2. Now we get to the meat of these first four verses—Solomon loved the LORD (READ 3:3-4):
 - a. As a young man (about 20 years old), Solomon loved the Lord and demonstrated it by heeding his father's instruction found in 1 Kings 2:3-4 (READ)

- 1) The number one commandment is to love the LORD with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength by obeying all His commandments
 - 2) So, it appears the young King Solomon was off to a good start early in his reign as king
- b. There is this matter, however, of Solomon's practice of making sacrifices and burning incense on the high places (3b); how do we interpret this in light of Solomon's love for the LORD?
- 1) The worst case is that Solomon was an idolater; this seems unlikely because of the statement regarding His love of the LORD, the lack of any other evidence of idolatry in the first 10 chapters, and the fact that chapter 12 makes it clear that it wasn't until the end of his life that Solomon engaged in idolatry
 - 2) A better case is that Solomon obeyed all of God's commands except the one about using the pagan high places to worship Him (Deuteronomy 12)
 - a) In other words, He wasn't an idolater but worshipped God inappropriately by reusing existing Canaanite high places
 - b) Some see this as an explanation of why Solomon went to Gibeon, "the great high place" in v. 4
 - c) The problem with this interpretation is that the high place in Gibeon was where the tabernacle and altar of God were, and the LORD seemed pleased with Solomon's sacrifices there
 - 3) A more likely case is that v. 3 is a general statement regarding Solomon's life as a whole, but with a sobering foreshadowing of what is to come—remember that the author is writing this after Solomon's death so he knows where the story ends
- c. Solomon worships God at Gibeon (READ 3:4):
- 1) The text tells us that Solomon offered 1000 burnt offerings at Gibeon but we have to read the more detailed account in 2 Chronicles 1:1-6 to get the full picture of what took place (READ)
 - 2) There weren't just offerings on behalf of Solomon; it was a huge event that involved commanders, judges, all the leaders of Israel and the heads of households
 - 3) The reason it was held at Gibeon is because that's where the tabernacle and altar were, and it could apparently accommodate such a large gathering

B. Solomon's request of the LORD (READ 3:5-9)
--

1. The LORD is obviously pleased with Solomon, so He appears to him in a dream and tells him to ask of Him whatever he wishes (5)
2. Solomon's response is often praised for its humility, but it's also dripping with spiritual and theological understanding; just look at the things he mentions and concepts he covers:
 - a. **FAITHFULNESS (6):**
 - 1) He refers to the LORD's lovingkindness and you may remember that I prefer to translate the Hebrew word here as "covenant loyalty" because it refers to God's loyalty and faithfulness; He is a covenant (promise) keeping God
 - 2) Solomon mentions it twice here: once as it related to David's relationship to the LORD as he walked "in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward" God, and a second time as it related to fulfilling His promise to David to make Solomon king

- 3) Solomon saw God's covenant loyalty not only in David's life as He walked faithfully before the LORD, but understood how it was God's faithfulness that led to him inheriting the throne from his father
- b. **SERVANTHOOD:**
- 1) Did you notice how many times he mentioned the word servant? He used it once of David (6) and three times of himself (7, 8, 9)
 - 2) It's clear from everything he said in his response to the LORD that he understood he was first and foremost a servant
 - 3) Contrast this with what we saw with his two brothers, Absalom and Adonijah, who tried to usurp the throne for their own purposes and glory
- c. **HUMILITY (7):**
- 1) Solomon is thought to have been around 20 years old when he became king
 - 2) Unlike David who had at least 10 years of military experience and working alongside King Saul, Solomon was inexperienced
 - 3) We see him express that here when he referred to himself as a "little child" who didn't know "how to go out or come in" (a reference to war)
 - 4) You get the sense here, and in the next two verses, that Solomon didn't feel he was up to the task without the LORD's help
- d. I wasn't sure what to call this next one so I'll call it **PROPRIETORSHIP (8):**
- 1) A proprietor is the legal owner of a business or entity
 - 2) Often times, a nation's people were referred to as the king's subjects
 - 3) However, Solomon didn't refer to Israel as his people, but rather God's people: "**Your people which You have chosen**" (8) and "**Your people**" (again; 9)
 - 4) This is not just a mark of humility, but a recognition that Israel was God's chosen people and the king served them on behalf of the LORD
- e. The last two I'm going to put together: **DISCERNMENT AND OBEDIENCE (9; this is where we finally get to Solomon's request; DON'T READ YET):**
- 1) QUIZ: without looking back at verse 9, what did Solomon ask for? Many would say wisdom or discernment, but that's not completely accurate, or at least it's not the full picture
 - 2) Most translations say that Solomon asked for "**an understanding heart**" or "**a discerning mind**":
 - a) The Hebrew phrase is more literally "**a listening heart**" or "**an obedient heart**"
 - b) In OT Hebrew, hearing and obeying are closely linked together, often to the point of being one and the same thing; they both come from the same Hebrew word, *shama*
 - c) For instance, the LORD said in Exodus 19:5, "**Now then, if you will indeed obey (lit. hear) My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine**"
 - d) What Solomon was asking for here wasn't simply understanding (e.g. head knowledge), but a heart that would hear the LORD and obey; the Holman translation probably comes closest to this idea by rendering this verse, "**a receptive heart**"

- 3) Solomon knew that it was this kind of heart, and only this kind, that would allow him to “discern between good and evil” and judge (govern) God’s people

C. Solomon’s gift from the LORD (3:10-15)

1. As we might expect, the LORD was so pleased with Solomon’s request, that He not only granted it to him but granted him even more than he asked for (READ 3:10-13):
 - a. He could have asked for a long life, or riches, or even the destruction of his enemies, but he didn’t
 - b. So, the LORD gave him “**a wise and discerning heart**” that was unmatched by anyone who lived before him or anyone who would come after him (we’ll see this next week in Kings 4)
 - c. He also gave him “**both riches and honor**” that would be unmatched by any other king as long as he lived (2 Chronicles 9:13-30 contains a detailed description of this):
 - 1) The gold he received every year alone amounted to over 22 tons and would be worth over a billion dollars today
 - 2) Estimates for his worth in today’s dollars range as high as \$2.2 trillion
2. There’s one more gift the LORD promised Solomon, but it came with a condition (READ 3:14-15):
 - a. The LORD would “**prolong**” Solomon’s days under one condition: that he would keep His statues and commandments just like David did
 - b. This was a reference to both the length of his life as well as the length of his reign
 - c. At first, it appears this promise came to fruition because Solomon’s reign lasted 40 years
 - d. However, he was only 60 years old when he died, which was 10 years younger than David
 - e. Tragically, as we’ll learn in chapter 11, Solomon didn’t keep the LORD’s commands, but in his later years began to worship the gods of the Canaanites
 - f. Had he remained faithful, the LORD would have extended his life and his reign

D. Solomon’s service on behalf of the LORD (3:16-28)

1. I labeled this section “Solomon’s service on behalf of the LORD” because one the roles of the king was to administer justice on behalf of God
2. Back in Deuteronomy 16:18ff the LORD commanded Israel to setup judges in each town: “**You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.**”
3. So, in the towns throughout Israel, disputes would normally be handled by the judges, but Jerusalem the king would often settle legal disputes; David did this in his days (2 Samuel 15:2a) and Solomon apparently did it in his day
4. In 3:16-28 we have an example of this, and for the sake of time I’m not going to read the passage, but instead summarize it:
 - a. There are two prostitutes who lived together and each one had a newborn son
 - b. The one woman claimed that during the night, the other woman rolled over and smothered her own son to death, but then swapped the dead son out for her living son
 - c. The other woman claimed it wasn’t true and that the living son was hers
 - d. Unfortunately, there were no witnesses so it was pretty much a she-said-she-said case with one woman’s word against another

- e. What Solomon does to solve the case is brilliant: he calls for the boy to be cut in half knowing that the real mother would rather give up the boy to spare his life than to see him killed
5. What we see here is just one aspect of the wisdom and discernment that the LORD gave Solomon, and it allowed him to administer justice on God's behalf

Takeaways (2)

1. When the LORD told Solomon to ask for whatever he wished, rather than ask for earthly things he asked for a **"listening heart"**; we might paraphrase Solomon as saying, "LORD, give me the disposition and desire to obey You"
 - a. How often do we ask God for such a thing?
 - b. If God appeared to you tonight, and offered to give you whatever you asked for, what would be on the top of your list?
 - c. It's not that we shouldn't ask or pray for earthly things, but if that's all we ask or pray for what does it say about us?
 - d. When we petition the LORD for the things we need, should it not reflect—at least in some respect—one of our greatest needs...the desire, ability, and strength to obey him?
2. A second takeaway is related: The LORD was pleased with Solomon's request because the thing that honors Him the most is the desire to love and obey Him:
 - a. After the LORD gave Israel the Law, all 600 plus commandments, He promised them prosperity for their obedience; but He summarized it all up by saying (paraphrase), "This isn't too difficult for you if you love me, obey my voice, and hold fast to Me" (Deuteronomy 30)
 - b. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, He said to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
 - c. 1 John 5 says, **"This is love for God that we obey his commands..."**