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Choosing and Losing; Royalty and Loyalty; Wise to Advise

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What's Ahead

Quarterly Preview

The first unit of this session explores the sin of Solomon and how it led to the division of the country into northern and southern kingdoms. Unit two tells how prophets such as Elijah went to the northern kingdom of Israel and tried to lead the people away from idolatry and back to God. While a few kings of Israel and Judah returned to the Lord, many did not.

The lessons in the last unit study the end of the northern kingdom and Jeremiah's plea to the people of Judah not to go down the same sinful path. But as the unit ends, Judah is sent into exile after the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem.

Here are some of the biblical principles you can apply to your life from studying these lessons:

- Compromise with the world's values means abandoning God's values
- The desire for success can lead to spiritual compromises
- God's Word must be heeded as well as heard
- God's plan for us may not match our expectations
- No one is beyond redemption

L E S S O N 1

For September 4 • Page 5

Making the Right Choices

As an election day approaches, most politicians devote themselves to convincing voters of their worthwhile goals, their experience, and their power to get things done. Television advertisements focus on their physical appeal and professional bearing. Speeches are typically chock-full of crowd-pleasing promises.

This strategy makes perfect sense. After all, this is how people get elected.

Or is it?

According to this week's Scripture passage, there was a time when leaders were chosen based on a very different set of criteria. Morality was more important than message. Discernment carried more weight than demographics. People, like God, understood that the spiritual health of a person's inner being was far more significant than outward symbols of power or wealth.

There is little chance that our political process will change to reflect such values. But, thankfully, we do not have to enter politics to live as moral leaders in the world. Each of us has the power to seek a discerning heart that chooses to follow God in wisdom and truth.

And where we lead, others will surely follow.

Think about and discuss the following questions:

- 1.** *How does personal morality affect a person's ability to lead others?*
- 2.** *Discernment plays an important role in a leader's life. Identify several ways that it might be used to lead a nation.*
- 3.** *Name the most "discerning" leaders that you have known, or known of, in your lifetime and describe how they exemplified discernment.*

Lesson Focus: A discerning heart is better than power or riches.

David's Directive to Solomon

1 Kings 2:1-4, KJV

1 Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying,

2 I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man;

3 And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself:

4 That the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel.

1 Kings 2:1-4, NIV

¹When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

²"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man, ³and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, ⁴and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' "

Many years had passed since King David's sin with Bathsheba and his war against his son, Absalom (2 Sam. 14—18). Now much older and very weary, David was ready to pass on the reins of power to one of his sons. The question for the kingdom was which son would inherit the throne of Israel. Out of David's numerous sons, two were mentioned as being the most powerful claimants to the throne. The first was Adonijah, the son of Haggith. He was the fourth born of David's sons and the oldest surviving son of David. The second claimant was Adonijah's younger half-brother, Solomon, son of Bathsheba. Both young men had powerful allies in the royal court.

However, both God and King David wanted Solomon to become the next king of Israel. First Kings 1 tells how Solomon thwarted Adonijah's early attempt to usurp the throne against

David's wishes and became king of the mighty nation his father had built. Hearing of Solomon's success, David called his favorite son to hear his deathbed directives. David's primary directive to Solomon was to show his loyalty to the Lord by following His commandments. If he did, David assured Solomon that the Lord would make him prosper. Though unspoken, David implied that if Solomon and his descendants failed to follow the Lord's commandments, they would fail instead of prosper.

David ended his directives to Solomon with suggestions on how to deal with David's living enemies before they became a problem for Solomon as well.

4. *What primary instruction did David give to Solomon on his deathbed?*

5. *What did David promise Solomon in response to his obedience?*

Solomon's Sacrifice to God

1 Kings 3:3-4, KJV

3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

4 And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

1 Kings 3:3-4, NIV

³Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

⁴The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

By the end of his fourth year as king of Israel, Solomon had severely dealt with any internal threats to his throne. He had also begun dealing with any external threats to his kingdom by making a marriage alliance with the pharaoh of Egypt (3:1).

To show his gratitude to God for the stability his kingdom now enjoyed, Solomon traveled to the high place near Gibeon and offered a thousand burnt offerings to the Lord there. Though the biblical writer clearly explained that performing an offering on

such high places went against God’s commandments, He seemed to make allowances for it, since the temple had not yet been built (vs. 2). Though the location used to make the offerings was once used for pagan sacrifices, Solomon’s intention was to thank and glorify the one, true God. The biblical writer makes a careful link between “love for the Lord” and “walking according to the statutes” (vs. 3, NIV). Obedience is very important to God. As Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching” (John 14:23).

6. *Solomon made sacrifices on the “high places” (1 Kings 3:3) of Gibeon, but did not come under God’s severe judgments. Why?*

Solomon’s Request of God

1 Kings 3:5-10, KJV

5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

6 And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

8 And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

1 Kings 3:5-10, NIV

⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

⁶Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

⁷“Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or

KJV

9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

10 And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

NIV

number. ⁹So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

¹⁰The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

God rewarded Solomon’s obedience by speaking with him through a dream. In the dream, God offered to give Solomon anything he requested. The typical wish of Solomon’s contemporaries would have included a long life, great riches, or the destruction of enemies. Instead of asking for these, Solomon requested a discerning heart so he could properly govern his kingdom. In making this remarkable request, the young Solomon, probably about 20–24 years old, acknowledged that properly ruling a nation called for more experience and knowledge than he could claim. Perhaps Solomon’s first four years in power had taught him how complicated running a kingdom could be.

The Lord’s response to Solomon’s humble request was to promise him the wisest and most discerning heart of all time. He also promised Solomon the long life, great wealth, and security from his enemies that the king had not requested. All Solomon had to do to insure receiving these blessings was to wholly follow the Lord.



7. What did Solomon request from the Lord? Why?

8. What did God promise Solomon in response to his request?

The ruins of a "high place" in northern Israel, perhaps similar to the one at Gibeon where Solomon offered sacrifices to the Lord (1 Kings 3:3-4). Photo: Publisher-owned image from the Lorraine O. Schultz Collection.

Seeing the Flower in the Seed

Discernment is as necessary today as it was in Solomon's time. Solomon understood that it was the ability to separate right from wrong (1 Kings 3:9). He knew that he would come up against many circumstances in ruling the nation of Israel that would not be as they appeared—it was discernment that Solomon would rely upon to judge between the apparent and underlying realities.

The prophet Samuel had a hard time “discerning” which of Jesse's sons should replace Saul as king of Israel. God told him that his discernment was lacking because “man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7b, NIV). In other words, Samuel was having trouble seeing past the apparent truths or outward circumstances and discovering the genuine reality.

We mustn't think of discernment as something mystical or inaccessible as we think about developing this trait. And younger adults should not think of wisdom and discernment as something that only comes with advancing age. At any age, we need discernment to get beneath the surface or get past the deceitfulness of others.

We ask God for discernment for ourselves to help us see things that are not immediately apparent. It is like the ability to already see a patch of wildflowers in a packet of seeds, or see a giant oak tree in a tiny acorn. Solomon received this ability simply by asking God, and we are exhorted to ask Him for the same gift (Jas. 1:5).

9. *Describe ways that discernment might be of help to a*

- *cardiologist*
- *personnel director*
- *marriage counselor*

10. *If you can, describe an instance that your own “discernment” revealed truths that were beneath the surface.*

11. *Identify some ways that discernment might save a person from future trouble or sorrow.*

Having Discernment in Your Life

Discernment for Solomon meant the ability to be successful in managing the development of a nation. For Christians today, the gift and ability to discern is important for managing the development of our personal life and family. Don't expect that this gift or ability will appear "full-grown" within you the moment you begin to receive it. It will come to you in seed form and will continue to mature throughout your entire lifetime. What's important is that it gets planted within, and that you continually water it by obedience and devotion to the Lord.

► *Ask the Lord for more discernment in your life, as Solomon did. Also, write down a problem area in your life where you need more discernment.*

KEY VERSE

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?
—1 Kings 3:9, KJV

So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?
—1 Kings 3:9, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

September 5 through September 11

Mon. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18—Compromise Can Weaken Our Faith.

Tues. Psalm 1—Do Not Follow Those Who Have No Use for God.

Wed. 1 Kings 11:1-8—Solomon's Heart Turns Away from God.

Thurs. 1 Kings 11:9-13—Solomon's Actions Anger God.

Fri. 1 Kings 11:14-25—God Raises Up Enemies.

Sat. 1 Kings 11:26-33—The Prophet Ahijah Speaks to Jeroboam.

Sun. 1 Kings 11:34-43—God Makes a Promise to Jeroboam.