

A LOOK AT A BOOK: 1 Kings, Pt. 1

September 22, 2013

CHAPTER 1

This first chapter, along with the first twelve verses of the second chapter, originally may have been a part of the conclusion of II Samuel.

David ruled Israel from about 1010 to 970 B.C., a period of forty years and six months (2:11). So the events in this section of I Kings can be dated and located with some accuracy. They took place during the last few years of the Davidic monarchy in the city of Jerusalem.

David was about seventy years old.

1:2-4. The enlisting of a lovely young virgin to nurse the king and “*lie in [his] bosom, that our lord the king may be warm*” was a traditional cure prescribed by ancient medicine. For example, Galen, the Greek physician, recommended that the health and heat of a young body could be transferred to that of an aging patient as a medical treatment. After a thorough search throughout the kingdom, Abishag the Shunammite was the young woman selected. Obviously, Abishag was to be more than a nurse for the king. The Septuagint translation makes it specific: “let her excite him and lie with him.” Although monogamy was the ideal marriage principle given by God in Genesis, polygamy was a widespread practice in Israel at this time. Even David, who was a man after God’s own heart, had numerous wives and concubines.

“*But the king did not know her*” (v. 4). Anthropologists have shown how ancient cultures sometimes required a test of virility to see if their aging king had the strength to continue ruling. Here is David the athletic giant-killer, David the valiant warrior-hero, David the noble ruler, David the talented musician, now weak, trembling, unable to leave his bed. This pathetic picture of the man whose name was synonymous with valor and strength reveals the honest realism of the Old Testament record. Even if it was unflattering, the inspired writers of the Word of God did not glamorize their heroes at the expense of truth. Senator Strom Thurmond, when he was asked about getting married at age seventy, said, “In my old age I’d rather smell perfume than liniment.”

1:5-10. Adonijah, now about thirty-five years old, was David’s fourth son. We know nothing of his mother, Haggith, one of David’s wives. Adonijah was by now the king’s oldest son since Amnon, David’s firstborn, was slain by the order of Absalom. Absalom, after his unsuccessful coup d’etat, was in turn killed by Joab’s men; another son, Chileab, is not mentioned in Scripture, probably indicating he died young. This left Adonijah as the oldest.

Adonijah is described as handsome, a desirable leadership quality in ancient cultures, but he was spoiled by a doting father. “*His father had not rebuked him at any time*” (v. 6).

Co-conspirators in Adonijah’s attempted coup are named in verse 7. First is Joab, the son of Zeruiah. He was a long-time military leader in David’s regime, but he had earned the king’s disfavor by having Absalom, David’s rebellious son, killed and by slaying two trusted leaders,

Abner and Amasa (II Samuel 18:9-17; 3:22-39; 20:8-10). No doubt, David had made Joab feel rejected, especially when he appointed Benaiah to the military post Joab once held.

Adonijah's premature celebration is a classic example of counting chickens before they hatch. Such a feast should have climaxed, not initiated his dash for the throne. As Maclaren put it, "They who feast when they should fight are likely to end their mirth with sorrow." Adonijah was guilty of another offense that is frequently repeated today. He tried to disguise his self-promotion as God's will. He "*exalted himself, saying 'I will be king'*" (v. 5), then planned a religious feast to mask his selfish manipulations hoping they would pass as God's will.

1:11-14. Ignored by Adonijah, Nathan senses his own peril and that of Bathsheba and Solomon. Nathan unfolds a two-part plan. First, Bathsheba must remind David that he promised the throne to Solomon. This pledge appears nowhere in II Samuel. Second, Nathan says that he will confirm what she tells David, just in case the king does not understand or agree.

1:28-31. This complicated drama now reaches its climax. Despite his well-chronicled physical problems, David rises to the occasion. He will make Solomon king. Indeed, he will do the deed "today," or before his age and infirmity make the act impossible.

1:32-37. Solomon is to be placed on the king's own mule to demonstrate his new status. Next, Zadok and Nathan will anoint Solomon king, which will give him divine approval in addition to his royal approval. Finally, he is to be placed on David's throne, most likely as the older man's coregent. Benaiah, the warrior, offers enthusiastic military approval of the proceedings.

1:38-40. David's plan quickly gains popular support. Apparently Nathan and Bathsheba correctly assessed the people's desire for David to name a successor. Solomon must still deal with Adonijah, but he can now operate from a position of strength.

1:41-48. While finishing their feast, Adonijah and his guests hear the uproar. The trumpet blast makes the veteran politician uneasy. All has changed in a few hours' time. Every person Adonijah snubbed has been honored by David (1:42-45). Solomon has been established, the people approve, the royal officials have praised David for his choice, and the old king praises God for what has occurred (1:46-48).

1 KINGS 2

DAVID'S LAST WORDS AND DEATH

1 Kings 2:1-12

In the Old Testament, a person's dying words were especially significant. So the setting here calls readers to give particular attention to this portion of the book. We do not know how much time elapsed between the anointing of Solomon and the death of David, a period called a coregency. According to Josephus, all the events recorded in 1 Chronicles 28 and 29 took place during this interval. Apparently David recovered somewhat from the illness described in chapter 1, and enjoyed a few additional years of joint rule with his son.

In his last words, David asked Solomon to do four things:

1. Keep God's law.
2. Execute Joab, the murderer of Abner, Amasa, and Absalom. David somehow believed their blood was on his hands, and he could not be free from that curse until Joab died.
3. Reward the loyalty of Barzillai. Barzillai was a Transjordan chieftain who brought food to David's people in the wilderness (2 Samuel 17:27-29; 19:31-39).
4. Execute Shemei, whose curse on David was considered a capital offense (Exodus 22:28).

1 KINGS 3-4

Beginning in verse 4 there is the beautiful account of Solomon's prayer and God's gift of wisdom.

In a dream, which was a frequent channel of revelation in Old Testament days, God appeared with a forthright invitation, "Ask! What shall I give you?" (v. 5). Here the God of heaven bends down to grant the supplication of a man and graciously puts the key to all His treasures in the young king's hand. Within the bounds of reason, Solomon could have obtained anything he wished.

There is another lesson in this passage related to the proper attitude of those who approach God in prayer. Solomon begins his prayer in the spirit of gratitude, acknowledging the bountiful blessings of God in the life of his father David as well as in his own experience (v. 6). He prays humbly. "I am a little child," Solomon admits (v. 7). He was young, probably in his early twenties. He was not a typical overconfident youth who believed he could do better than his old-fashioned father. Solomon recognized the heaviness of his burden.

Solomon asked God for "a hearing mind" inclined to hear and do God's will. Wisdom, being more than apprehension, comprehension, or knowledge, was considered in the Old Testament to be the greatest gift.

God also gave Solomon more than he asked. In addition to wisdom, Solomon was to receive riches and honor in unprecedented portions (v. 13). Ironically, his not wishing for material things was the reason he got them. Isn't it true that the people who do not make wealth their priority are the people who can be most safely trusted with it and who, when they receive it, usually enjoy it the most? "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

We learn here also that God gives sufficiency to the one upon whom he confers responsibility, to the one who doesn't rush into an office or responsibility but rather is called to the task by God.

Solomon's Wise Judgment

3:16-28. There follows in this section a convincing illustration of the supernatural wisdom with which Israel's legendary young king was blessed. Two prostitutes who were roommates approached King Solomon with a delicate and complicated legal problem: namely, the true identity of a newborn baby. Both distraught women claimed the baby as theirs: the plaintiff accusing the defendant of intentionally switching her dead baby for the plaintiff's live one; the defendant countering that the plaintiff was lying and that the living baby belonged to the defendant. Notice that the common people, even prostitutes, had right of access to the king for judgment.

Exercising a discernment and practical judgment beyond his years, Solomon proposed a drastic and shocking solution that would kill the remaining child. He knew he could count on the tender love of the real mother. Her concern for the safety of her child would surface and identify her. He was right. Verse 26 literally says, "her compassion grew warm." The real mother was willing to lose her child in order to let it live.

Solomon's Rich Resources

Some estimate the household of Solomon, for which the enormous provisions in verses 4:22-23 had to be gathered, consisted of fifteen thousand persons. Others suggest as many as thirty-six thousand. The "fatted oxen" were pen-fed cattle in contrast to the more common variety that grazed in the pastures.

Since at this period in history the use of horses and chariots was a new military strategy, Solomon's possession of so many was a sign of growing luxury, which may have carried the seeds of future evil (4:26).

What an impressive inventory of wealth, even for a king; but the crown of Solomon's gifts, in the mind of the author, was still his wisdom. His "largeness of heart" referred to in verse 29 points to his broad interests in poetry, botany, biology, ornithology, ichthyology, astronomy, arithmetic, and medicine. The wisdom of Egypt in verse 30 refers to geometry, astronomy, and the preparation of ointments and medicines.

Jewish tradition (as well as the Koran) credits Solomon with the ability to converse in the language of every beast, fowl, fish, plant, and demon. Ancient rankings put the cedar tree at the top of the list of plants and hyssop at the lowest level; thus Solomon's botanical interests were all inclusive.

1 KINGS 5-6

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

The building of the temple in Jerusalem marks a high point in the development of Israel's faith. Their long history as a nomadic people, living in tents and following their flocks and herds, had made them content with a portable worship center. But now Israel was a settled community with

cities and fortresses and even a capital with plans for a palace. In God's providence, it was now time to give more permanence to their worship as David had dreamed of doing.

Understanding it to be God's will, Solomon willingly accepted the task of building the house of God in the place of his father David. As soon as he had consolidated his kingdom, he began to make preparation to begin construction. We are told in 6:1 that work on the temple began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, so even with a substantial head start, it still took the young king several years just to get ready for such a complex project.

1 Kings 5

Solomon recruits Hiram and plans the temple

5:1-5 Why was David not permitted to build the house for Yahweh? In 1 Chronicles 22:8 David gave two reasons which came from the Lord: (1) "You have shed much blood," (2) "You have made great wars." Perhaps out of a feeling of filial respect, Solomon mentioned only the latter, which he interpreted in the best possible light. According to Solomon, the warfare his father waged was defensive and not so much displeasing to God as it was a demand on his time, leaving the king no opportunity to build. The implication is that if the Lord had "put his foes under the soles of his feet" sooner, David would have had time to build the temple, and God would have permitted it.

Peace and prosperity affect different people in different ways. Solomon said, "Since God has given me rest on every side, since there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence, since He has bestowed upon me unprecedented wealth and wisdom, therefore I will build Him a house." The wise king did not take his happy situation as an opportunity for selfish, luxurious repose, but heard in it God's call to a great task.

There is a curious statement in verse 6:7. "No hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built." Alexander Maclaren finds a beautiful spiritual lesson in the verse: namely, the importance of silence in the work of the kingdom and in the life of the believer. God's message is not always heard in the earthquake or fire, but in the still, small voice. The incarnation did not occur with sensationalism, but unobtrusively, silently.

However magnificent a temple may be, the message of verses 6:1-13 is that it has no spiritual value unless the people who use it devote themselves totally to God's control. The sanctuary is but a symbol. The essentials are obedience to His will and observance of his commandments. Notice that God did not say He would dwell in the temple, but "among" His people.

It took Solomon seven years and six months to finish [Master Plan] the temple. As it turned out, the glory of the great edifice was short-lived. Because of his disobedience, it was plundered just five short years after his death (14:2-6). Furthermore, the continued disobedience of the people led to its total destruction in 586 B.C.

1 KINGS 7

SOLOMON FURNISHES THE TEMPLE AND COMPLETES OTHER BUILDINGS

The conjunction “but” in verse 1 is intended to contrast the thirteen years required to build Solomon’s own house with the seven years required to build the temple (6:38). Solomon purposely allowed the construction of his house to drag on for thirteen years, while he had accelerated the temple construction and finished it in seven years. We must remember that many years of preparation, planning, and accumulation of materials had preceded the seven-year temple project, while the work on the palace apparently had no such head start. Furthermore, while the temple was more elaborate and intricate, the palace complex was more widespread, involving a number of separate buildings, and thereby more time-consuming. Considering these factors, Solomon probably gave priority to the temple and put more attention and time on its construction than on his palace.

“His own house” refers to the entire royal complex.

1 KINGS 8

SOLOMON DEDICATES THE TEMPLE

Chapter 8 is composed of three distinct sections: (1) the bringing of the ark and the tabernacle together with its vessels into the temple, and the message of Solomon on that occasion; (2) the dedicatory prayer of Solomon; and (3) the blessing of the congregation followed by their sacrifices. Since the temple was completed in the eighth month (6:38) and not officially dedicated until the seventh month (8:2), it must have stood empty and unused for eleven months, probably so that the dedication could coincide with the Feast of the Tabernacles. No doubt during this interim, the finishing touches were put on the new facility and detailed preparations made for the elaborate dedicatory ceremonies. Although some commentators disagree, the tabernacle in verse 5 is apparently the historical one which had been at Gibeon. It had housed the ark for many years before David made a interim home for it in Jerusalem. The old tent was probably deposited somewhere in the temple as a sacred relic.

The two tablets of stone that Moses had deposited in the ark at Horeb were still there as the only objects in the sacred chest. (However, Hebrews 9:4 indicates that Aaron’s rod and a pot of manna were also kept in the ark.) As the ark was put in place, a cloud, representing the approving presence of Yahweh, filled the house, and inspired Solomon to quote the short poem that introduced his formal dedicatory address (vv. 12-13).

The most impressive section of the chapter is the prayer of Solomon beginning with verse 22. It is actually a series of short petitions asking God:

1. To keep His promise to David (vv. 23-26).
2. To maintain His constant presence in the temple and accept the prayers of those worshippers (vv. 27-30).
3. To punish those who swear falsely (vv. 31-32).
4. To send rain during droughts (vv. 35-36).
5. To help Israel in other calamities (vv. 37-40).
6. To hear the prayers of strangers (vv. 41-43).
7. To give Israel victory in battle (vv. 44-45).

8. To have mercy and forgiveness during captivity (vv. 46-51).
9. To answer both the king and his people (vv. 52-53).

Apparently Solomon prayed in the open courtyard beside the altar of burnt offerings, standing, as Chronicles adds, on a scaffold or pulpit. The custom of standing with hands upraised to God was a more common stance of prayer in the Old Testament than kneeling, although verse 54 indicates Solomon was kneeling with his hands spread up to heaven.

Solomon's petition has some important features that provide valuable lessons in prayer. Notice that God answered the request for an everlasting kingdom, but in God's own way and in His own time. Eventually David's line showed itself unworthy of God's blessings and it died away. But in the mystery of God's providence, He restored it again through the perfect obedience of David's Son, Jesus of Nazareth, who reigns forever and forever!

Having completed his prayer, Solomon stood to bless the people. And what a moving scene it must have been: standing there in the newly constructed temple, with a united nation gathered before him, the cloud of God's presence still filling the house, and unprecedented peace on every border. The inspired man of prayer looked back on the long road from Sinai and the wilderness and summed up the entire history of Israel in one sentence: "There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses (v. 56).

1KINGS 9-10

THE GOLDEN AGE OF SOLOMON

Twenty-four years had passed since the aging David had named Solomon his son as the successor to the throne and the new king had been hurriedly anointed in an emergency ceremony at Gihon. After putting down all internal political opposition and consolidating his kingdom with Israel's international allies, Solomon had gone to the ancient worship center at Gibeon to offer sacrifices to Yahweh. There God appeared to him in a dream, offering him the gift of wisdom and the promises of riches, honor, and long life. Now, twenty-four years later, God appeared to Solomon a second time, reminding the king that his prayers were still being answered and promising continued blessings on his kingdom if certain conditions were met by Solomon and the people.

Solomon moved on to establish a rich and powerful nation that for many years was the center of wealth and wisdom for the entire world. This section describes the glory of the "Golden Age of Israel," and how the nations of the world, acknowledging that glory, paid homage to Solomon.

9:1-9 – God appears to Solomon a second time

We are not told where or exactly when the appearance took place, but we are given a clue in verse 2 where it says, "as He had appeared to him at Gibeon." In the Gibeon experience, God appeared at night in a dream, so we may assume this second appearance was also in a dream, perhaps in the king's private chambers in the palace. The parallel passage in Chronicles adds that the appearance occurred at night.

God's first appearance to Solomon was no surprise, since Solomon had gone to Gibeon specifically to worship and Lord and seek His face. But this second appearance may have come

unexpectedly, not in response to Solomon's worshipful seeking, but by God's own initiative. It may be that the Lord decided to confront Solomon again, because the king was slipping deeper and deeper into apostasy.

Sometimes, when we have completed a demanding and challenging task, we are tempted to relax our commitment, slacken our discipline, and give in to self-indulgence. It is in these moments that we need spiritual encouragement. So God appeared to Solomon as he finished the great work on the temple and the palace. He appeared to speak words of stimulus, promise and warning.

Beginning with verse 3, God sets forth certain conditions under which He will act toward Solomon and the people of Israel in the future. They are expressed in the literary forms of "if...then" and "if not...then."

1. *"If you walk before Me as David did,"* In other words, we are continually to be conscious of His presence and live and work knowing that the Father's watchful eye oversees everything we do.
2. *If you walk "in integrity of heart."* The heart was considered, as it is symbolically today, the center of the personality and the will of humankind.
3. *If you walk "in uprightness."* Integrity of heart comes first, because it does no good to perform righteous deeds if our hearts are not right with God first.
4. *If you "do according to all I have commanded you."* Obedience has always been the test of true faith.
5. *If you keep "My statutes."*
6. *If you keep "My judgments."*

The reward for meeting the positive conditions is that God would establish Solomon's throne forever as He had promised David his father.

The negative conditions are listed in verse 6. Here the singular "you" is changed to the plural as God included the children of Solomon and the entire nation of Israel. In this case the King James translation is more accurate because it uses the singular word "thou" in verse 4 and the plural word "ye" in verse 6 to show where the Hebrew changes the pronoun. The negative conditions are:

1. *If you "turn from following me."*
2. *If you "do not keep My commandments."*
3. *If you do not keep "My statutes."*
4. *If you "go and serve other Gods and worship them."*

The punishments for committing these negative shortcomings are related to the land, the temple, and the people. They are listed in verse 7:

1. *"Then I will cut off Israel from the land."* The word is literally "send away" from the land.
2. *Then I will cast the temple out of My sight.* He had promised that His eye would be in the temple perpetually if they obeyed Him. But if they disobeyed, then the opposite would take place: the temple would be out of His sight.
3. *Then "Israel will be a proverb and a byword."*

4. *Then passersby will hiss and question the destruction in astonishment.*
5. *Then the answer will be “They forsook the Lord.”*

10:1-13 – The Queen of Sheba visits King Solomon

These verses tell one of the most intriguing and fascinating stories in the Books of Kings. The story must have had that same appeal in the first century, because Jesus referred to it in Matthew 12:42.

Scholars generally agree the kingdom of Sheba was in the southern part of ancient Arabia. She was a queen, not the wife of a king, but the ruler of this pre-Islamic kingdom. She traveled fifteen hundred miles with a retinue of camels bearing precious gifts. Having heard of his legendary wisdom, she came to test Solomon with hard questions, or riddles. The word is the same one used for the riddles by which Samson confounded the Philistines in the Book of Judges. Josephus describes a similar test of Solomon’s wisdom by King Hiram. The Arabians were especially famous for their collections of riddles.

Solomon, of course, passed her test with flying colors, and she exclaimed that “the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard” (v. 7). The queen was also impressed with the wealth and splendor of the buildings in Jerusalem, the king’s banquets, his servants, and the rich apparel they wore. She was overwhelmed. Verse 5 says when she saw it all “there was no more spirit in her.” Spirit is also the world for breath, so some translations say, “she was breathless” or “it took her breath away.”

It is obvious that the queen came for some purpose more serious than exchanging riddles with the wise king. A journey of fifteen hundred miles is too long and the rigors of travel in that century across desert lands too demanding for such a trivial purpose. The gifts were too great, the cost too high for her to have come just to satisfy her curiosity about the rumors she had heard. She must have been a serious seeker after deeper truth. She must have had a yearning, a hunger for god that drove her to Jerusalem. She came to Solomon tortured by eternal questions, and apparently the king was so anxious to show her the secular glories of his kingdom that he forgot the noble purpose for which he and the nation had been chosen. It’s a tragedy easily repeated by individuals and churches today.

When Jesus used the queen of Sheba as an illustration in Matthew 12, He pointed to the fact that she was a seeker, and that she was to be commended for her quest. At great sacrifice, humility, and effort she made her way to the best source of truth available to her. The passage has a lesson for desperate seekers today. A greater one than Solomon has come. His wisdom is infinitely greater. His power is greater. He is the way and the truth. Every question has its ultimate answer in Him. He is the satisfaction of every yearning. And when we meet Him, we too find that the half has not been told. He is greater than our highest expectations.

1 KINGS 10

10:14-29 – The Great Wealth and Power of King Solomon

The last verses of chapter 10 provide a final review of the fabulous wealth and power of Solomon's monarchy before the tragic ending described in chapter 11. First, we read about his

gold. An annual income over and above what he received from merchants, traders, and other kings and governors was \$281,318,400. He had so much gold he had to think up creative ways to use it, and when it came to gold, Solomon could be very creative. For example, he fashioned ceremonial shields out of gold to hang on the columns of the House of the Forest of Lebanon when they were not being used in his kingly processions. The large shields, like those the soldiers used to protect the entire body, would be valued today at \$120,000 each, and he made two hundred of them. Then he made three hundred small round shields like those the soldiers carried on their left arms, each costing, in current dollars, \$30,000. That was \$33,000,000 in gold shields alone, just to be used by his guards when the king went up to the temple. No wonder the queen of Sheba was amazed at “his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord” (v. 5).

Next we are told Solomon built himself an ivory and gold throne decorated with the figures of lions. Gold was so common a commodity in Israel that silver was “accounted as nothing” (v. 21), and was “as common in Jerusalem as stones” (v. 27).