

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF I KINGS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY

– PART TWO - CHAPTERS 7-11

The book began with Solomon establishing his kingdom, promised to him by God. To do so he had to overcome his rivals and those who opposed his reign. In the same way the Holy Spirit wants to establish His sole reign within our lives. In doing this Solomon demonstrated the other side of the character of a loving, forgiving God. God is also just and must deal with those whose hearts remain unchanged despite His love.

Solomon, at this point unlike the Holy Spirit, made a disastrous mistake, at the beginning of chapter 3, when he married for political reasons, just like his father David did, instead of waiting for the wife of God's choice. His sin would have consequences for generations to come. Having made the worst choice of his life, he then made the best one when he asked the Lord only for wisdom. This proved to be the key to all other blessing that God would lavish upon him. In the same way in the New Testament we are told to ask for only two things, the Holy Spirit,(Lk.11:13) and wisdom(James 1:5). Only when we have the wisdom of God on any matter do we know what to ask for next, and so all the rest of God's blessing becomes available to us.

In the chapters which follow Solomon applied the wisdom of God to human problems(3), choosing leaders(4), planning a project(5) and carrying it out.(6) His great project was the building of the temple. The work of the Holy Spirit is to build the church of Jesus Christ which is us, our bodies being His temple.(I Cor.3:16;6:19)

CHAPTER SEVEN details the building first of Solomon's own house and then much detail of the finishing and furnishing of the temple. It was clearly a work of art though we have only words instead of pictures to describe the beautiful things which were created. In charge of this part of the work was a skilled craftsman, Hiram, whom God had endowed with exceptional ability to work with his hands. God's wisdom extends to art and to the appreciation of the talent God has given to others in this way.

CHAPTER EIGHT describes the high point of the whole project when the ark of the covenant containing the 10 commandments and the other symbolic objects which reminded Israel of the secret of a relationship with God, was finally brought into the temple. At this moment God's glory filled the Holy of Holies signalling that God had moved into His house just as He had occupied the tabernacle.(Ex.40:34) Solomon gathered everyone together to remind them that all this had been God's plan and of the importance of them continuing to trust the Lord wholeheartedly. He told them that if they trusted the Lord He would bless, and even if they sinned, when they turned back to the Lord He would forgive. The temple became for the first time the place of sacrifice, a picture as always of the cross of Christ. The heart of our relationship with God is the cross.

CHAPTER NINE brings 20 years of building to an end. The Lord appeared to Solomon a second time to give him a promise and a warning. If he continued to trust God wholly, the Lord would go on blessing him and his family. If he turned away, as Israel had so often done in the past, then all that he had accomplished would be destroyed. If we forget God, the family suffer first. Our spiritual investment in the lives of our children is the most important legacy we leave behind us. The rest of the chapter relates how the friendship with the king of Tyre somewhat soured because he did not like the gift Solomon gave him, but was then somehow restored. Dealing openly and promptly with differences between friends is a very important aspect of Christian wisdom and maturity.(Matt:18:15; Phil.4:2) The Egyptian pharaoh, his father in law, presented his daughter

with some conquered cities. The chapter concludes with some more details of Solomon's administration. In all these business issues he had the wisdom of God.

CHAPTER TEN relates a remarkable story of a foreign queen drawn to Israel by accounts of the wisdom of Solomon. Impressed though she was by the visible evidence of Solomon's success it was what she heard that left the deepest impression. God's wisdom expressed throughout His word and explained by His servants will draw people to us from far and wide. Just as David in the cave of Adullam,(I Sam.22) way out in the wilderness, was a magnet to the distressed, those in debt and the discontented, so Solomon attracted the famous and powerful from all over the world of his day. Every question the Queen of Sheba asked, Solomon was able to answer. God has promised the same to us when we too are put on the spot.(Matt.10:19,20) It appears from Ethiopian history that this visit introduced the people of that country to a faith in God which has survived to the present time.

CHAPTER ELEVEN is the tragic end of an otherwise inspiring story. As Solomon had accumulated horses, chariots and gold, so he now began to collect wives, hundreds of them! His wisdom shown in so many other areas, seems never to have been applied in this one aspect of his life. As with each of us, there was one vulnerable place in his life where the Devil seemed to be able to tempt him successfully again and again. Having made this mistake just once in marrying Pharaoh's daughter, it was so much easier to make it again. Almost certainly his father's example of multiple marriages had made him blind to the danger of this course of action. Deut.17:17 had spelled out this danger especially for kings, yet both of them, otherwise so open to the word of God, had missed it. His wives turned his heart to their gods so that all he had done in teaching the people and building the temple for the worship of God was undermined. In the book of Proverbs Solomon had some great wisdom about marriage to the wife of God's choice which he never applied to himself. Having warned him over and over, the Lord now told him how his unfaithfulness would result in most of the kingdom being taken from his descendants. His enemies were growing and awaiting their opportunity. Jeroboam was the most dangerous.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. When the temple was ready, God moved in. If our bodies are to be His temple, what are the conditions for God to move into us and what will be the effects when He does?(Acts 2:1-4)
2. How does the design and furnishing of the temple picture the basis of our relationship with God?(Heb.9,10)
3. What blessing did Solomon promise to the people in chapter 8 if they were faithful? What warnings did he give if they were unfaithful? In what way are his blessings and warnings still relevant today?
4. Solomon became richer and more powerful than any king of Israel before or after him. How does this teach us about the Christian life?(Eph.1:18,19; 2:7; 3:8).
5. What were the consequences of Solomon 'loving many foreign women' for him and for his family? How could he be so wise and successful and yet so foolish and a failure?