

The Wisdom and Justice of a New Adam

1 Kings 3

In the Disney movie *The Lion King*, Mufasa the lion is king of the whole animal kingdom. As king, he rules over his kingdom according to his proper nature as a lion, and all is right with the world. The plains are lush and green, with water plentifully available, and the great circle of life continues its natural order. But Mufasa's brother Scar, jealous of Mufasa's fame and position, plots the murder of his brother, and once completed, even convinces Mufasa's young son Simba that Mufasa's death was Simba's fault. In fear, Simba runs away, and Scar takes over. The 1994 animated version of this movie indicates that Scar instituted a new order in the animal kingdom that looks a lot like socialism (the 2019 "live animation" version blunts this note a bit). And, of course, wherever you find socialism, you find scarcity, hunger, and suffering. The once lush green plains become a dry, lifeless desert under Scar's unnatural policies. And the whole plot of the story turns on Simba's struggle to remember and embrace who he is. It is only when Simba finds the confidence of his rightful identity as the lion king that he returns, kills Scar, and restores the animal kingdom to the greatness that it had before.

One of the reasons I like this movie is because it is very different from most Disney movies made since 1994. How many Disney movies revolve around the plot of a character who has to learn to follow his or her heart against the external order of society? But not *The Lion King*. In this story, Simba must learn to suppress his heart and conform his desires to the order that is outside of himself. Scar represents the undoing of the natural, given order, and Simba must arise to restore it. And that is a fitting picture of the rule of a wise king. Wisdom in Scripture is conformity to the order God has established, rather than the foolish assertion of one's own desires against God's established order. When a wise king rules, the kingdom under his authority flourishes. When a foolish king rules, the kingdom under his authority suffers. Adam was the first king of the world God made. He was given dominion over creation, but he rebelled against God's order and brought down the curse of God and a consequent disordering of the world. But from the very beginning, God promised that a new Adam, a new king, would come and restore what the first Adam destroyed. Genesis 3:15 promises a seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent. In the manifold promises to Abraham, the promise of an offspring who will possess the gates of his enemies and in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed contributes more to the picture of the coming Messiah. Genesis 49:10 tells us this offspring of Abraham will come specifically from the tribe of Judah. And God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 narrows even further the messianic hope to David's house. The Messiah, the last Adam, will be an offspring of woman, a descendant of Abraham, of Judah, of David. Solomon seems to fit these criteria. As you enter further into the story of his reign in 1 Kings 3, if you were reading this for the first time, you might begin to ask: is Solomon the long-awaited Messiah?

It's a fair question. Chapters 1-2 have recounted the story of Solomon's transition to power after David and the securing of his kingdom. Now chapter 3 answers the lingering question: what kind of king will he be? The answer: a king who rules in wisdom and justice. Solomon is clearly a new Adam figure, and in many ways he succeeds where Adam had failed. Does the author want us to pin our hopes for the restoration of creation itself on King Solomon? Of course, we know from where we sit today that the answer to that is no. Solomon is now long gone, but all

Scripture tells us something about Jesus Christ. Let us listen closely to the text, hearing what it tells us about Solomon the new Adam, so that it may strengthen our faith in Christ the last Adam.

The text before divides easily into two sections, one showing us Solomon's prayer for wisdom and the other showing us Solomon's wisdom in action as he rules justly. Let's walk through them one-by-one. First, note in our story

1. A new Adam and the knowledge of good and evil (vv. 1-15).

I took piano lessons for a few years as a child, and then I quit, and then during my senior year of high school I took one more year of lessons. I learned enough about music that I can look at a page and tell you true information about the musical piece on it: what key it is in, what the time signature means, what the notes are, etc. But I can't sit down at a piano and immediately play any piece of music beyond a beginner level. I never developed the instincts and muscle memory to sightread well. My wife, on the other hand, practiced piano for many more years than I did as a child. She can sit at the piano, open a new piece, and play it right off the bat. Even though we both know how to read the music, only one of us has the skill to play it, a skill that has developed through years of practice. That's a good illustration of biblical wisdom. Wisdom is far more than knowledge. It is the skill of living well in submission to God. The wise heart has the "muscle memory" that knows how to react in any given situation in a way that honors God. More than any other biblical figure, Solomon is associated with wisdom. He wrote biblical books that teach us wisdom, including the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and most of the book of Proverbs. His wisdom will be highlighted throughout chapters 3-10 of 1 Kings. Here in verses 1-15 we have the origin story to Solomon's wisdom.

I want to skip over verses 1 for the time being, and we will come back to it later. The main focus of this first half of the passage is the encounter Solomon has with the Lord at Gibeon, which was one of the "high places" of worship. Once the temple has been built in Jerusalem, the high places will be viewed very negatively, because the Lord had commanded Israel in Deuteronomy 12 only to offer sacrifices in the place where he would cause his name to rest. So the high places were at least tolerated prior to the temple's construction, during the time when worship of the Lord had not been fully centralized. Gibeon was located about 5-6 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Even though David had moved the ark to Jerusalem some time ago, 2 Chronicles 1:5 tells us the tabernacle and bronze altar from the days of Moses remained at Gibeon, which explains why it became a place of sacrifice for Solomon. While Solomon was worshiping there, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said to him, "Ask what I shall give you." That verb "ask" is used eight times in the span of a few verses, highlighting the Lord's generosity. As Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 7:11, "If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" May we never assume that our God is stingy and determined to withhold his gifts from us. Far, far from it. He is lavish in his goodness, so let us ask him for good gifts. May the rebuke of James 4:2, "You do not have because you do not ask," never apply to us, for our God is eager to bless.

Verse 3 tells us that Solomon loved the Lord. What an amazing summary of a man's life and character! Solomon's response to the Lord's generous offer shows us his love for the Lord. Let's take his prayer verse-by-verse, starting with verse 6: "And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness,

in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.” Solomon recognizes that his kingdom is not something to which he is entitled. It is a gift of grace, granted to him by the covenant love of God for his father David. He sees himself as part of a story that is much bigger than himself, a story that revolves around God’s love and grace, and covenant. So he goes on in verse 7, “And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in.” He recognizes his own youth and inexperience. He does not know the ins and outs of governing and leading. He doesn’t assume that he knows it all, but he demonstrates humility before the Lord. The temptation of young men is often toward arrogance. It is rare to find a young man who hasn’t assumed, at some point, that he could run the world much better than the older generation if he just had the opportunity. That arrogance often drives young men to be dismissive of the wisdom of the past, which frequently gets them into trouble. Young men, I know that many of you are fed up with political correctness, leftist feminism, and the “woke” movement, and rightly so. You can find many online influencers who reject those ways of thinking and attract young men to follow them. But here’s a word of warning: just because someone on YouTube rightly opposes the nonsense of our culture doesn’t mean that what he is offering as an alternative is necessarily good. The enemy of your enemy is not necessarily your friend. If you can honestly look at your own heart and conclude that listening to online influencers is making you more arrogant, then turn them off, for the sake of your own soul. Above all, young men, learn humility before the Lord and before the men he has placed in your life to disciple you. Solomon exhibits no arrogance here, just a humble recognition that he needs the Lord’s help.

And then he continues in verse 8, “And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.” His concern is not primarily for his own narrow interests, but rather for the well-being of Israel and the fulfillment of God’s purpose in them. So he finally comes to the request in verse 9: “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” The phrase translated “understanding mind” in the Hebrew is literally “a listening heart,” indicating an inner life of total submission to the Word of God. Wisdom begins with listening to what God has spoken and obeying it. And the Lord is pleased with his prayer. Solomon didn’t focus his request on his own narrow interests: long life, riches, the life of his enemies. Solomon recognizes that he has not been made king for his own personal gain. He represents the rule of God over Israel, so his greatest concern is to rule well in wisdom. As a result, the Lord promises to give him, not only wisdom, but also all the blessings for which he didn’t ask as well. Our God is good and lavish in his blessings.

Note that in verse 9 Solomon asks for a listening heart “that I may discern between good and evil.” The wording here is remarkably similar to the mention of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2:9 and 17. The first Adam was commanded not to eat from that tree. Why? It’s not because the knowledge of good and evil is a bad thing. Kings need the knowledge of good and evil to know how to rule well. Adam was commanded not to eat from the tree because he had to learn the knowledge of good and evil through dependence on God, not by seizing it for himself. So in the moment of testing, when the serpent tempted his wife to eat from the tree, Adam should have acted in royal judgment against the serpent to show his trust in the Word of God. He should have crushed the serpent’s head, silencing its lies. By that means, I

think he would have then been given authorized access to the tree and would have had the wisdom to rule in righteousness the world God had made. But he failed the test, allowing the serpent's voice to replace the Word of God. Following the lead of his wife, he tried to seize the knowledge of good and evil by his own autonomous efforts, which is the exact opposite of wisdom. By refusing to trust God, Adam plunged the human race into the folly of sin.

In many ways, Solomon's story is the opposite of Adam's. In chapter 2, King Solomon refused to listen to the voice of a woman for whom he had great affection, his mother Bathsheba. Instead of catering to her wishes, he discerned the crafty lies of the serpent Adonijah, and he acted in royal judgment to crush him and all the "serpents" associated with him who would threaten Solomon's kingdom. Now, with the serpents gone, Solomon is in a position to receive the Lord's blessing of the knowledge of good and evil, and so he asks for that gift. He is expressly dependent on the Lord in this request. By pursuing it in humble dependence on the Lord, Solomon receives the gift of the knowledge of good and evil, and he uses it to rule his kingdom. Where Adam failed, Solomon has succeeded. Israel has a new Adam, and in some ways, a better Adam, reigning as king.

Solomon's wisdom is not merely for his own benefit. It is for the good of his kingdom. So how will the wisdom of Solomon bring blessing to Israel? Chapters 3-10 will show us the many dimensions of blessing that Solomon's wisdom brings, and the first of those blessings mentioned is justice. That brings us to the next section of the story of chapter 3:

2. The gift of wisdom and the just rule of a new Adam (vv. 16-28).

Justice is the virtue of giving to each person what is due to him or her. If you are a just person, that means you give what you owe to another in any situation. A just person pays his mortgage on time, honors those in authority over him, defends the reputation of his neighbor from slander, etc. Whatever you rightly owe to another person, giving it to him or her is the virtue of justice. For a king, the demand for justice carries additional weight, because a king must enforce justice over his kingdom. He must hear cases and render decisions that give to all parties involved what is rightly owed to them. This is why Proverbs 17:15 tells us that he who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both alike are an abomination to the Lord. It is unjust to give to someone contrary to what is owed to him. As the chief enforcer of justice in Israel, Solomon needs wisdom to know what justice is in any situation.

After the account of Solomon's prayer for wisdom, the author wants us to see that God has indeed answered his prayer. So he tells a story of the testing of Solomon's wisdom with an impossible situation. Two prostitutes came before him, one the plaintiff and one the defendant. These women lived together. They had no husbands, and you can imagine that as they got into the later stages of pregnancy, they had no men hanging around them anymore. So it was just the two of them in the house, a point that is repeated three times in verse 18 to highlight that there are no witnesses to hear from. The first woman had given birth to a child, and then three days later the second woman had done the same. According to the first woman, the second woman had accidentally smothered her own baby during the night, so she stole her roommate's living child and left the dead body in her roommate's bed while the roommate was sleeping. The next morning the first woman awoke to nurse her son and behold, he was dead! But then she looked at him more closely, and she realized, "That's not my baby!" So now she has come to the king to seek justice against her roommate.

Of course, the defendant does not agree with this story. She claims the opposite: the living child is the one she bore, and the dead child is the plaintiff's. You can imagine these two women screaming at each other as they press their claims before the king. King Solomon has before him one living baby, two women who claim he is hers, and no witnesses. It's a "she said, she said," situation, as verse 23 summarizes: "Then the king said, 'The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; and the other says, 'No; but your son is dead, and my son is the living one.'" So now what? There's no Maury Povich to come out with DNA tests to confirm one story or the other. How does a wise king act in this situation?

King Solomon did something shocking. "Bring me a sword," he said. Then he commanded the child to be divided in half, so that half could be given to one woman, and half to the other. And then he watched their reactions. We can assume the women reacted simultaneously, but as the text tells us, they reacted in very different ways. The first woman, the plaintiff, begged the king to give the child to the other woman in order to spare his life. She revealed, in a moment of testing, her maternal instinct. No mother could watch her baby cut in two. She would sooner let someone else have him than endure that horror. The defendant, on the other hand, did not reveal any maternal instinct. She showed, instead, the coldness of resentment, content with the fact that if she couldn't have the child, then neither could her roommate. With this bizarre stunt, the king drew out of the first woman the maternal instinct that was within her, and he drew out of the second one the bitter selfishness that exposed the awful deed she had done. And he rendered his decision: "Give the child to the first woman. She is his mother."

I find it interesting that Solomon had asked for a "listening heart" (v. 9), and the Lord gave him the ability to listen. He was attuned to the Word of God, so he wanted to give justice in this situation, even though he was dealing with prostitutes who were the outcasts of society. How easy it would have been for the king to write off this whole messy situation: impoverished women who sell their bodies, babies born with no fathers, two low status women screaming at each other in his court. They each played their part in making this bed, so let them both lie in it and sort it out themselves. But the king did not assume that justice doesn't apply to the lower rung of society. He showed no partiality, but approached this case as he would any other. He was attuned to the Word of God and its demand for justice for all people made in the image of God, not just some. But in addition to that, he was also attuned to the world around him. He knew exactly what to listen for from the women, and he knew how to draw it out of them. His listening heart brought resolution to an impossible situation.

Verse 28 concludes the story: "And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice." It is clear to all that the wisdom Solomon prayed for, the ability to discern good and evil, God has granted him. As we have followed the transition to Solomon's kingdom in chapter 1 and the securing of his kingdom in chapter 2, we are all wondering: what kind of king will Solomon be? Chapter 3 tells us: he will be a wise king who rules justly. He is a new Adam, a serpent crusher who rightly possesses the knowledge of good and evil and deploys it for just ends.

So then, does that mean Solomon is the long-awaited seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15, the descendant of Abraham who will bring blessing to the world, the descendant of Judah who will wield the scepter over a new world, the son of David whose kingdom will never end? Of course, we know better than that. Let's go back to the beginning of our story. Verse 1 reads, "Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt. He took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem." Some commentators view this action positively. Egypt was a major power on the world stage, and the fact that Solomon could marry the Pharaoh's daughter and solidify a political alliance could indicate that he has raised Israel's profile in the world. And what if Pharaoh's daughter became a true worshiper of Israel's God in the process? Wouldn't that further indicate that Solomon has begun to extend the blessings of God beyond Israel? But I am not persuaded. Flip with me over to 1 Kings 11:1-3: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, 'You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart." I don't think the author wants us to see Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter as a good thing. Although in chapter 3 Solomon has not yet engaged in the worship of idols, he has compromised on obedience to the Lord for the sake of political gain. He has sown the seeds that will bring forth a terrible sin later. Solomon is a new Adam, in more ways than one. Yes, he is a king, a son of God who rules in righteousness according to the knowledge of good and evil. And he will also have a terrible fall, just as Adam did. As it turns out, there is too much Adam in King Solomon.

And there is also too much Adam in each one of us. We are fools at heart, trying to make ourselves gods rather submitting ourselves to the one true God. What we need is wisdom, but not the wisdom of mere moral reform. We need the wisdom that involves death and resurrection with Christ: the total annihilation of the old Adam and complete identification with Christ. Wisdom begins with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 11:1-9:

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

King Solomon gave justice to a prostitute whose son had been kidnapped. But he couldn't end prostitution in Israel. He couldn't restore that baby to a two-parent home. He couldn't eradicate

the economic conditions that first led these two women into prostitution. The rule of Solomon is but a shadow of a far greater rule to come. For when King Jesus comes again, even wolves will be at peace with lambs, and little children will be at peace with venomous snakes. Solomon is a new Adam, but he is certainly not the Last Adam.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, now sits at the right hand of God, and all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. And though this world remains under the curse of death, and though injustice continues to run rampant, one day he will come again, and the world itself will be made new. The story of Solomon's wise and just rule is but a taste of a far greater reality on which we must fix our hope. When that day comes, there will be no more dead babies, no more fatherless families, no more prostitution, no more sin, no more tears. This is my Father's world. The battle is not done. Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heaven be one. Amen.