

God's Game of Thrones: *New King Seeks Wisdom 1 Kings*

As I promised in the Midweek message via email, and if you don't get that be sure to let me know, there is no deep drama, no political murders as part of today's scripture. I am happy to say we are done with those... Oh, one of David's sons by one of King Saul's daughters tries to set himself up as king, but as he promised, David has Solomon anointed King, and though the other son fears for his life, Solomon welcomes him to the court saying, if you do well, no harm will come to you. I even want to tell you that upon re-reading the role Bath-Sheba played in this small drama, I came realize that I had read way too much plotting and politicking into her actions the last time I read this section, so I really had no good basis to suggest she was ambitious way back when David took her to his bed. My apologies to Bath-Sheba... perhaps a little sexism in my reading there... hmm

Instead we have a young King offered anything by God, and Solomon chooses to ask for wisdom in order to rule God's people well. And given Solomon's influence upon the Hebrew Scriptures, it is clear God fulfilled Solomon's wish. The Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon all are part of Solomon's legacy though he did not write all of them. This is clear particularly in the last chapter of Proverbs, a beautiful piece of advice where King Lemuel's mother tells him what to look for in a wife. Including wisdom from other cultures is not surprising for Solomon, as he is the most intellectually inclusive of the Kings of Israel, which we will explore in the coming two weeks. One of the ways this is particularly clear is in Solomon's Book of Proverbs where the Wisdom of God is a Woman - Sophia. And Solomon does not merely suggest Wisdom is an important thing to have, but it reads as though Wisdom is an essential part of God. Lady Wisdom says that she was "the first of God's creations, there at the beginning – God's right hand in creation." In Eastern Orthodox Theology, Holy Wisdom is understood as the Divine Logos who became incarnate as Jesus Christ; sometimes this is illustrated in icons. In fact, Sophia has been championed as a key part of the Godhead by some Eastern Orthodox religious thinkers. Some of Proverb's descriptions of Wisdom sound very

similar to how we describe the Holy Spirit. The additional fact that the word Spirit is in the feminine tense in Hebrew, lends credence to some modern theologians seeing in Solomon's writings the root of more holistic images of gender in God.

I think wisdom is the most important gift God can give us. Oh, we humans have a wonderful capacity to figure things out. We have over the millennia figured out logic, philosophy, medical advances, how to fly to the moon, how to explore the depths of the ocean. We've unlocked the power of the atom, followed amazing spiritual and political leaders, and developed machines to think for us.

One of the bad parts about all this progress is we have begun to think that with enough time we will figure everything out on our own. Isaac Asimov, 20th century writer once said of us, "The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom." What distinguishes wisdom from knowledge?

The dictionary says knowledge is "facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject." In contrast, wisdom is defined as "the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment; the quality of being wise. Synonyms for wisdom include: sense, common sense shrewdness, , judiciousness, judgment, and prudence. Knowledge is technical, but wisdom is about how to use knowledge in the best way.

Albert Einstein, the most celebrated theoretical physicist of the 20th century makes this clear when he said, "Any fool can know. The point is to understand.... It is not that I'm so smart. But I stay with the questions much longer." Knowing Einstein was anguished about his part in making atomic weapons a reality, this distinction between having the knowledge to do something over against the wisdom to know how to use it correctly or even whether one should do it at all are two very different things.

Before we get into our stories of wise people, or wisdom I want to prime the pump with three quotes from some very different sources, Mohandas K. Gandhi,

once said, "It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err." The Talmud, a text of the commentary on scripture over millennia by some very wise Rabbis says "The highest form of wisdom is kindness." And finally a theologian I have never before quoted, Jimi Hendrix, famous guitar player said, "Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens."

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned for seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.'