

*We are moving deeper into the history of Israel's kings as we read through the Bible. Saul has risen and fallen. David rises, and falls as well. But the writers of Samuel and Kings want to make sure we're reminded that David is still God's king. Despite his, because of his?, very human foibles and strengths, David reigned for 40 years before he "slept with his ancestors" (1 Kings 2:10). His reign was the glory days. It was as if they even knew it at the time. And, while Israel may never have really been as important politically as these histories suggest, his reign was the pinnacle. It is to the reign of David that Israel still looks back. It is over Jerusalem, the City of David, that Israel still fights for possession with their Palestinian brothers and sisters.*

*So, David has left the stage, but notice, as you read through Kings, how much he is still present in the story. Notice how the damage and the glory from his reign are still playing out. The writers of Kings will seemingly take any and every opportunity to remind us of David.*

*Solomon, the son of David by Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, is now king. It was a bloody road that led to his coronation, but once on the throne, he makes a politically astute marriage to the daughter of the Pharaoh. Now, hopefully, he can at least have some peace on that side of his border. And the writers also tell us that Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David.*

*Clearly, for the writer of 1 Kings, the legitimacy of Solomon's reign is beyond question. True, he was not born of David's first wife. True, he was not the eldest son of David. Yet, it is to Solomon that the wisdom and understanding of God are given as they are given to no other mortal.*

*You can understand how our ancestors understood kings to be divinely ordained after reading this text.*

*As you read more about Solomon this week, notice that he's also a renaissance man. He talks about plants and animals, so he's a botanist and a biologist. People came from all over the world to hear his wisdom. He composed 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. Not to mention his 700 wives and 300 concubines.*

*His story is told in inhuman terms. He is the Superman of the ancient world because nobody could really emulate him. We could look at him and aspire, but the bar is set too high.*

*And God appears to Solomon in a dream—“ask what I should give you”, says God.*

*What would we ask for?*

*The ability to fly?*

*Health, wealth, and happiness?*

*A winning lottery ticket so we could build a fellowship hall that was more easily accessible for people with mobility issues?*

*A BCS championship game for the Broncos?*

*But Solomon gives the answer that makes the rest of us look bad. As soon as we hear him say, “give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil...” we think, “yeah, what he said. That’s what I meant to say, God. I was joking about the lottery ticket.”*

*Solomon has answered well. He is King David’s son, after all. And God gives him a wise and discerning mind. God also then gives him riches and honor, which he did not ask for.*

*And then Solomon woke up from his dream.*

*Do you wonder what he thought as he woke up?*

*Was it real?*

*How long will it take until I know?*

*We aren’t told if Solomon’s wisdom came upon him immediately, or if he took the more normal course of acquiring wisdom, gradually, and usually after making mistakes. But we’re told he gets more than anyone. Ever. On earth.*

*And then the famous example of Solomon’s wisdom is presented. Two women come to him to solve a dispute. For many people in my generation, this text is better known by its use in a Seinfeld episode a few years back, when Kramer and Elaine fight over the ownership of a vintage bicycle. (“The Seven” is the name of the episode).*

*I'd like to tell you that being a subject of the wisest king ever would have made your Israelite life easier, but that doesn't seem to be the case. In order to feed his household each day, the people of Israel had to provide 175 gallons of flour, 300 gallons of meal, 10 fat oxen, 20 pasture fed cattle, 100 sheep, and deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fowl. That was food for a day.*

*And Solomon was quite a builder, building up defensive battlements, palaces, and the first temple in Jerusalem. So he conscripted laborers from Israel. 30,000 men who took shifts cutting down the cedars of Lebanon. 70,000 laborers and 80,000 stone cutters.*

*The writer of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings will talk about how happy the people were to do this labor and to provide this food, because there was peace in the land. But I wonder.*

*How did Solomon use his wisdom to benefit his kingdom?*

*I know that's a 21<sup>st</sup> century view of an ancient text, but I still think it is a fair question. Keep it in mind as you read through this narrative this week.*

*Why does even wisdom fail us? Even with the wisdom of Solomon, people still have to slave away as conscripted laborers. Even with the wisdom of Solomon, life is hard.*

*Our other text this morning, from Job 28, should serve as a reminder for us, whenever we start thinking that any one human's wisdom will make it all better.*

*"Where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Mortals do not know the way of it and it is not found in the land of the living."*

*The writer of Job seems to be saying, "yes, I've read your "history" of Solomon and let me state it more clearly. Stop trying to look for wisdom in the faces of your neighbors or yourselves."*

*You can search the earth and find gold, and silver, and precious gems. But there are no deposits of wisdom buried in the ground.*

*The deep doesn't know where wisdom is. The sea hasn't found it anywhere in its watery depths.*

*You could take all of the pearls, sapphires, coral, onyx, gold, and silver on the earth and not have enough money to purchase wisdom.*

*Not even the character of Death has a hold of wisdom.*

*But God understands the way to it. And God knows its place for God looks to the end of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.*

*I don't know if this answer is comforting for you—that we can never have the wisdom of God, to see why things happen as they do, to know the exact right thing to do in any given situation, because we are not God. Because we do not have the same view that God does.*

*Like the writers of Kings, we want to know that there is someone we can turn to who will know what to do, who will have all of the answers. We find our Solomons in many different places.*

*This larger narrative is a good reminder to us when we think that one person is going to save us. Whether that's Barack Obama, Ronald Reagan, or Coach Pete, the limits of human wisdom let us down time and again.*

*The story of Solomon is a cautionary tale for us. Where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?*

*Without giving away all of the story you'll be reading in Kings, I can say that all of Solomon's many blessings seem to complicate his life. He may have had great wisdom, but he didn't have the view that God does. Building the first temple in Jerusalem may have seemed a wise decision, but was the conscription of tens of thousands of laborers worth it? And 700 wives? Really?*

*The author of Job leaves us with an interesting line. After telling us that wisdom is not to be found by humans, he tells us where wisdom can be found: "Truly, the fear of the Lord is wisdom. To depart from evil is understanding."*

*Fear of the Lord.*

*A number of you have questioned me about what it means to “fear the Lord” as the phrase has shown up in our readings this year. You don’t fear the Lord in the same way you fear tigers, terrorists, and snakes. CS Lewis, in the Problem of Pain describes “Fear of the Lord” as being filled with awe, feeling wonder or a sense of inadequacy when you consider your relationship with God. It is, above all, grounded in love. It is not a fear that leads to despair but a fear that leads to humility. Fear of the Lord is understanding that only God can see the bigger picture. Fear of the Lord requires trusting that we are safely in God’s hands, no matter in what situation we may find ourselves.*

*So, what are we to do with these two texts that don’t seem to agree about wisdom?*

*The book by former General Assembly Moderator Jack Rogers that we are using in our Adult Ed class right now gives us some guidelines for interpreting Scripture. While I appreciate all of the guidelines presented, one really seems to fit the dilemma we’re in with wisdom.*

*“Guideline 1: Recognize that Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, is the center of Scripture. The redemptive activity of God is central to the entire Scripture. The Old Testament themes of covenant and the messiah testify to this activity. In the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ—the Word made flesh, the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic hope, and the promise of the Kingdom. It is to Christ that the church witnesses. When interpreting Scripture, keeping Christ in the center aids in evaluating the significance of the problems and controversies that always persist in the vigorous, historical life of the church.”*

*This does not mean that the writers of the Old Testament knew about Jesus. They aren’t fortune tellers predicting a future they can’t possibly imagine. But it does mean that as Christians, we can’t help but see the Old Testament in light of Jesus.*

*And when we think of God’s wisdom, it is likely not to Solomon that we would look back. It is to Jesus. Jesus is the only person that I know of in history who was able to see things from God’s view point. If you think of what he taught his disciples, his wisdom was not your standard human variety—it actually was often in opposition to human wisdom. Listen to his advice from Matthew 5:*

*'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." <sup>39</sup>But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; <sup>40</sup>and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; <sup>41</sup>and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.'*

*He took the Levitical command of an eye for an eye, which was a reminder of justice—if someone has taken something from you, the only thing you can demand in return is that same item. So, if I steal a pair of your shoes, it doesn't allow you to take my car in return. He took this command and turned it on its head.*

*If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, the Levitical way to solve the problem would be to hit them on their right cheek. And violence, we know, tends to escalate. So Jesus command to not hit back, but to offer the other side of your face runs counter to the wisdom of the world.*

*So, as you read about Wisdom as it threads its way through our Year of the Bible, I invite you to consider that our best example of God's wisdom on earth is the person of Jesus Christ. May his example guide us in the way we should go.*

*'Where then does wisdom come from?  
And where is the place of understanding?*

*'God understands the way to it,  
and he knows its place.*

*For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
and sees everything under the heavens.*

*When he gave to the wind its weight,  
and apportioned out the waters by measure;*

*when he made a decree for the rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt;*

*then he saw it and declared it;  
he established it, and searched it out.*

*And he said to humankind,*

*"Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;  
and to depart from evil is understanding."*

*Amen*