

Parishes of St Philips and All Saints Kew with St Luke's Kew
Where all God's Children are Welcome

Bible Study for the sixteenth week of the Covid 19 lockdown

Section 1 Kings 3:5-12

Prayer: Loving God, open our hearts to your word and our ears to your voice. May we hear and understand all that you are saying to us. Amen.

Read the passage through twice:

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."

Background

The succession from King David to Solomon was not a straightforward process, not least because David had a lot of potential heirs. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba, some way down in the pecking order of sons. However, many of David's sons had rebelled against him or gone into partnership with foreign powers, so David and his advisers were intent on having Solomon crowned. Bathsheba played her part too, by extracting a promise from the dying David that Solomon would be king after him. For the full shenanigans, read the first two chapters of 1 Kings. Gibeon is a village not far from Jerusalem, in the tribal district of Benjamin, where Israel had erected altars to foreign gods during the declining years of King David. Although Solomon was devoted to the God of Israel, he none the less joined in sacrifices at Gibeon to other pagan gods.

Some questions

- God speaks to Solomon in a dream. There is a lot of precedent for this, throughout the Old and New Testament. Why?
- Given that Gibeon is a pagan site, what is God's rationale behind this encounter?
- Why had Solomon gone to the pagan rites at Gibeon, so soon after his coronation at Jerusalem? Is this a faith decision, or a political decision?
- If Solomon has dual allegiances in his faith, what does that say about the God of Israel confronting him in this place?
- If this is purely a political move, after the instability of David's final years as king, what does that say about the God of Israel confronting him in this place?
- What if Solomon was in the pagan place for both reasons – faith and politics? What does that say about the type of leadership he was envisaging for himself?

- God’s opening line to Solomon is direct – “Ask what I should give you” – while being open at the same time – there is no promise attached, yet. What would you ask for, if you were in similar circumstances?
- What do you make of Solomon’s response? How genuine does it sound?
- Has God been steadfast in his love to David? David was by no means a perfect king, his failings were many, and the setbacks to his reign numerous.
- Did David walk before God “in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart”? Is this a fair or idealised account of his father’s life?
- Solomon interprets his receiving the crown as an act of God, when the mechanics of it were messily human. Is he correct to think this?
- It is very difficult to work out Solomon’s age when he acceded to the throne. However, he was not a child, so why does he use such language about himself?
- David had carried out a complete census of Israel in the latter years of his reign, much to God’s annoyance and against the strict rules of the Law. It is not that many years since that event. Solomon has probably got a pretty good idea of how many people there were in Israel. Why does he say that they are “so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted”? Is he being disingenuous, or is he demonstrating his knowledge of the Law?
- What exactly is “a discerning mind”?
- Solomon’s request is for the ability to govern wisely, knowing the difference between right and wrong. Were not all the tools for such governance at his disposal already, in the Law?
- Has Solomon succeeded through flattery or true humility?
- God grants Solomon great wisdom and the promise that no one will compare with his “wise and discerning mind”. What lessons does this hold for us today?
- Solomon’s wisdom is a gift from God, and has remained legendary. Given the choice, as Solomon was, what gift would we ask of God today, if he put such a request to us now? Have you got a different answer from the one you gave earlier in this study?
- There is a problem with dreams – they have to be reported to others by the person who had the dream. Therefore, either Solomon is the author of this text, or it is a piece of theological back-filling to explain Solomon’s great wisdom and wealth. What do you think?
- God’s wisdom is always available to his creation, and it is not limited to those who govern. In our current crisis, we all need God’s wisdom in one form or another, but especially those who have big decisions to take, and those with great responsibility for the nation and people’s health and well being.
- The relevance of this passage to today is clear. How will it inform your prayer? How will it inform your decision-making?

Read the passage through again, out loud if possible

Review

What has this passage taught you about

- God?
- Jesus Christ?
- The Church?
- Our current situation?

Prayer: Generous God, you gave Solomon wisdom to govern with insight and grace. Grant us that same wisdom, that in our daily lives we may clearly distinguish between good and evil, and walk faithfully with you all the days of our life. Amen.