

David Meiklejohn

19 September 2021

# Making Good Choices

1 Kings 3

## Introduction

What do we commend children for? What do we say when we are talking to a child and want to encourage them? Sometimes it can be “that’s very clever!”, or maybe “you’re looking very pretty!” Perhaps we might say “You’re getting very tall!” Or “Wow! You’re really talented!”

Now don’t get me wrong, it’s good to encourage children and these are nice things to say. But do you notice that they’re all things that they can’t really control? A level of intelligence, natural beauty, stature and talent are all things we’re born with. Or not. Maybe we should praise them for things they do have control over.

What could they be? How about effort? “You worked really hard on that, well done.” Or what about kindness? “That was a really nice thing to do for that person.” Or maybe making good choices. “I think you did the right thing there.”

Today we’re going to look at someone who had a lot of choices to make. And he knew he needed help. There’s a theory that every time we make a choice the universe splits into two, each one with the consequences of what we chose to do. Whether that’s true or not, our choices can make a huge impact on our lives and the lives of those around us. And the higher a position of influence we have, the more impact our choices have on others. In our passage Solomon is now the king of Israel, and he feels the weight of responsibility, he knows that his decisions could be for great good or for disastrous bad.

## Background

If you’ve been following along with our series on 1 Kings you’ll know that king David has died and Solomon is now King. He became king after a 40 year reign of his father, and Solomon was around 20 when he took on the role. He is the third king that Israel has had. Saul was chosen by the people, as a big, strong, powerful man. David was chosen by God, as a boy whose heart was for following God. God has promised David that his line will lead to the eternal king, and Solomon is the first step in that journey.

Last week we looked at 4 of Solomon’s adversaries and how he dealt with them, showing mercy but also decisiveness and justice. Now we find him trying to build up strength.

## Four Strong Pillars

At the start of chapter Solomon seems to want to build 4 pillars to rest his kingdom on. Look at verse 1:

*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. [1 Kings 3v1]*

Firstly, Solomon sought political strength. He did what was very common in the age and right up until recent times: he married someone from the royal family of a neighbouring country. As he took Pharaoh's daughter for his wife he was guaranteeing Egypt's friendship in international affairs. Egypt was a strong ally to have and it might seem a shrewd move. However we later learn that this wife, and others who he would later bring into his harem from other countries, brought their gods with them, and caused Solomon to stray from walking with the true God.

Secondly, Solomon sought regal strength. Remember Israel was fairly new to kings: they had only had two so far - Saul and David - and God had warned them that a king would cost them dearly. So it was quite plausible that the people might decide that kings were too much of a bother and get rid of their monarch. Solomon built a palace, a solid reminder of royalty and the position he had among the people. It would be a constant reminder that Solomon was their king.

Thirdly, Solomon wanted to build spiritual strength. As we find out in verse 2, a temple has not yet been built for the Lord. And so the people are going out to various high places and worshiping and sacrificing there. By building a temple in Jerusalem, Solomon would fulfil David's great ambition, and also centralise and focus the worship of the Jews. The temple would become the one place they would have to visit regularly to bring their offerings. And it would likely act to unite the people in accepted patterns and methods of worship.

The fourth pillar is one of military strength. Solomon sees that the city of Jerusalem is vulnerable to attack, and so he extends the city wall to make a strong barrier. Within this shield Jerusalem becomes a very tough nut to crack, and in fact the citizens much later grow over-confident in their ability to withstand any enemy, and the Babylonians come sweeping in.

These seem fairly solid decisions. Solomon seems to be doing pretty well for a young king, barring the knowledge that his foreign wives would later lead to disaster. However despite these decisive acts, he knows that he himself is young, and that bad choices could cause chaos.

## **The Dream**

In verses 3 and 4 we find Solomon at Gibeon. He is there to make sacrifices to God, at what verse 4 calls the great high place. Why was this?

If you cast your mind back to March, we were studying the book of Joshua. The Israelites were ploughing through the land of Canaan, winning battles left right and centre. The Gibeonites lived in one part of Canaan and were seriously worried they would be wiped out. So they played a trick on Joshua, arriving at his camp with dried out wineskins and shabby clothes, claiming to have come a long way, and made a peace pact with Joshua. When he found out they lived just down the road it was too late. So the Gibeonites lived in safety within Israel, and God seems to have blessed them. In fact the ark of the covenant ended up in one

of their towns after being captured by the Philistines. We find out from 2nd Chronicles chapter 1 that while the ark had been brought back to Jerusalem by David, the tent of meeting, where Moses met with God, and the brazen altar, are still in Gibeon. And so it is on this altar that Solomon makes his thousand beast sacrifice. And as he spends the night here he is given the dream.

It's the ultimate gift, isn't it? Verse 5 says:

*At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." [1 Kings 3v5]*

We've all thought about what we would choose if we were offered a wish for absolutely anything. Would we wish for wealth, health, fame, love? Solomon's answer shows a great deal of humility as well as a good measure of wisdom already.

First he praises God for what he has done for his father David, and for Solomon in making him king. But he compares himself to a little child. He's not, of course: he's around 20, and he has already shown some maturity in the decisions he has made, but he recognises that a king's decisions are important, and he isn't too proud to admit that he needs help in that area.

And so he asks for wisdom:

*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? [1 Kings 3v9]*

What exactly does he want? He wants an understanding mind. He wants to be able to assess situations and see which path is the good one to take and which is the bad. He wants to be able to make good choices.

The Lord is pleased with Solomon's wish, and he grants him this understanding so that no one before or after him will be seen to be as wise as Solomon.

In fact the Lord is so pleased with Solomon that he makes him 3 other promises. The first two are unconditional: God is going to make Solomon rich and famous. He will have wealth and honour. The third promise is conditional. If Solomon will walk in God's ways, then God will grant him long life.

So the rest of Solomon's reign must have been great, mustn't it? Will all that wisdom he must have known what was the right thing to do in every situation. Well, we are going to find out in future weeks that it turned into a bit of a disaster. You see, knowing what is right and what is wrong is only half the story. We must then choose what is right. And very often Solomon chose the wrong option.

None of us will ever be as wise as Solomon. But we do often know what is the right thing to do. James even encourages us to ask of God if we're not sure, and he will give us wisdom. But then it's up to us to make the right choice.

## **Dividing a Baby**

From verse 16 we see an example of where Solomon's wisdom was on display. Two women come to him with one baby. Both had babies but one has died in the night, and now both are claiming that the living baby is their own.

Today we might do a DNA test, but they didn't have that technology back then. So Solomon comes up with a fairly drastic solution. He calls for a sword and commands that the baby is cut in two with half given to each woman.

Of course the baby's mother cries out to let the baby live. She would rather give him up than have him die. And Solomon discerns that she is the real mother, so gives her the baby. It's tempting to feel the other woman's response is unrealistic. She says that the child will go to neither of them, and the dividing should go ahead. But I don't think it's too far fetched.

Remember this is a woman who has just lost her own baby. She will be feeling deep hurt, and probably great guilt at what has happened. She knows that dividing the baby will mean that neither of them will have a living child, but bitterness makes her think that would be preferable to having the child around the house reminding her of her own lost one.

And so Solomon's great wisdom is revealed to the world, and it will continue to be revealed as time goes on.

### **Application**

In 7th century China, the economy was doing well, but there was a problem. People were using coins made of iron to buy and sell goods. But iron is heavy, and isn't very valuable. In fact you might have to carry a bag of coins about which was heavier than the goods you were buying. Then someone came up with an idea. He issued a note, saying that the holder had a large amount of coins and they were in his keeping. The trader took this note and offered it as payment for some goods. If the seller accepted the note he would take possession of the coins even though they were sitting with the banker. But would someone accept a note like that?

There was a choice to make, and the repercussions of that choice would circle the earth.

When paper money was first accepted it supercharged the Chinese economy and changed finance forever.

And so we have choices to make every day. We don't usually know what the results will be, but God has gifted his Spirit to live within us and to give us understanding hearts, to guide us to the right choice. Our part is to listen to the Spirit and make good choices as they're revealed to us.

Our past is full of these choices, and sometime when we think of the decisions we made we cringe in embarrassment. However we can't change the past, it's set in stone. What we can do is endeavour to listen to the Spirit and make better choices in the future.

And it's even more important these days than ever to make the right choices. The ripples of the effect of our choices travel farther than ever. A pop star can say something silly and 20 million people around the world get to hear it in an instant. There's never been a more important time to think about our words and our actions.

The most important choice of course, is whether we decide to follow Jesus, or go our own way. The fishermen by the banks of Galilee were faced with that choice when Jesus said “Come, follow me”. They chose to follow him, giving up their livelihood as they did so. They faced many hardships along that road but it was the road to life for them, and it’s the same for us.