

DISCERNING WISDOM: A STUDY OF THE WISDOM AND FAITH OF KING SOLOMON

Johnathon Case

Introduction

Growing up, I often found King Solomon to be one of the most curious figures of the Bible. As a young boy, I was astonished by the fact that a man who was offered anything that his heart desired could have the moderation to ask for wisdom and not wealth or power. I always fancied that I could follow his example and, if faced with the same opportunity, I would ask for the same thing. However, as I grew older and learned the rest of his story, I began to realize just how strange it was that Solomon, who had so pleased God with his humility, ultimately turned from God and lost his faith. Why was Solomon's great gift of wisdom not able to give him security in his faith? Ultimately, my thesis is a challenge to myself, a man who desperately desires to become wise, to understand how I can avoid falling into the same fate, and avoid losing my own faith.

It is important to note when studying Solomon's life, that faith does not mean a mere belief in God's existence. Solomon had several personal encounters with God including building the temple that brought God's presence to dwell on the earth. Such experiences would have secured an absolute

knowledge in the existence of God, whereas today, we must fill in this step without God's physical presence. The fact that Solomon turns away seems all the more disheartening in this light since he had both advantages of a secure knowledge in God's existence and the gift of great wisdom to aid him in securing his faith, and yet he could not maintain his faith. Since belief in the existence of God was not an issue, the faith I am referring to is actually a love for God and a trust in Him as the ultimate good for men, which seems to be the true definition of faith. In order to achieve this faith, we, today, have the added step of securing our belief in God's existence, but that alone is not true faith as Solomon would understand it.

Solomon's definition of faith as a love for God recognizes that God is a good for men. We love those things that we believe to be good. Ultimately, the truest faith would then be a love for God as the ultimate good for men, the good that is the source of goodness in all other goods. The fact that Solomon dedicates the majority of his life to the pursuit of building God's temple suggests that he had a deep love for God, but the fact that he turns away suggests that he loses this love for God. His life, then, seems to raise the question of whether wisdom can lead men to recognize God as the ultimate good, or if it must lead them to determine that he is not good.

In *Proverbs*, Solomon seems to have seen a path that would allow him to combine his wisdom with his faith in a way that recognizes God as the ultimate good and

Johnathon Case, of Creston, Ohio, is a 2015 graduate of the Ashbrook Scholar Program having majored in Political Science, Philosophy, and History.

wisdom as a subsidiary good that helps him pursue the goods God has ordained. However, in *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon seems to blame wisdom for having led him to his fate and despairs that everything under the sun is futile. Studying the path that Solomon drew in *Proverbs*, and then examining his own life in light of that path, will hopefully show where Solomon himself turned, and perhaps even provide a warning that will help other men who attempt the path to avoid the same danger.

CHAPTER 1: Proverbs and the Path to Wisdom

Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel, writes the book of *Proverbs* “for learning wisdom and discipline.”¹ Throughout his compilation of wise sayings, he is hoping to teach the reader how, and why, to acquire wisdom by drawing a map that shows the path to wisdom, and the many dangers that lie along that path. Solomon’s directions lead through many stages referring to the fool, the simple, the young², the wise, and the discerning, claiming to provide each with instruction for acquiring more wisdom. By reading the proverbs, the fool, the man who does not obey the Law, will hear wisdom’s call and face a choice to accept wisdom’s rebuke or reject it and remain a fool. The simple man who obeys the Law without questioning it, without wisdom beyond obedience, can learn new things about the Law that cause him to raise questions, becoming a young man. The young man who raises questions about the Law and studies it to find answers can find many answers in the proverbs, and become wise. The wise man finds that many of his ques-

tions are answered, but he realizes there are some questions that are not answered directly by the Law that he must answer himself. This can cause him to question the goodness of the Law itself, but the discerning man will realize that the very fact that the Law does not answer every question explicitly is a good in itself by giving men the ability to choose the good, rather than merely obey it. The discerning man is able to see the ends toward which the Law aims, and loves the Law for its goodness. He then is able to act wisely by knowing the ends the Law pursues, and seeing how to pursue them even when the Law is unclear. Doing this several times, and getting ideas of how to do so through reading the proverbs, will cause the discerning man to become adroit as he becomes skillful at applying the Law in practical ways.

Solomon first notes that “the fear of Lord is the beginning of knowledge,”³ and so he attempts to show how to develop a fear of the lord. He notes that it is foolish to despise wisdom and discipline, and warns the reader to “heed the discipline of your father and do not forsake the instruction of your mother.”⁴ Instruction and discipline are related to establishing a fear of the Lord because they accustom a man to obeying wisdom in the form of someone wiser than himself so that he can see the wisdom in obeying the Law, which is the foundation of a fear of the Lord. The fool who ignores the instructions of his parents will not obey the Law, and so, will not fear the Lord. Instruction and discipline seem to be the means by which “wisdom cries aloud in the streets,”⁵ calling to the fool through his parents instructions in an attempt to discipline him in the fear of the Lord. By connecting instruction and discipline to a fear of the Lord, Solomon suggests that a parent’s discipline

¹ Proverbs 1:2

² Solomon seems to use “young” in regards to being young in wisdom, not age, given the character of the text and the other words he has used (fool, simple, wise, and discerning).

³ Proverbs 1:7

⁴ Proverbs 1:8

⁵ Proverbs 1:20

should instruct the son to fear the Lord, to obey the Law.

The fear of the Lord seems to entail obedience to the Law and to the father's instructions and commandments. Obeying the Law leads one from foolishness to simplicity. Therefore, "a wise son – It is through the discipline of his father; a scoffer – he never heard reproof."⁶ Solomon places a large responsibility on the parents, and thankfully, David, his own father, was a man after God's own heart and was able to teach him well. It would almost seem that Solomon is only able to praise the instruction of parents because he himself had such a good father, but Solomon does not leave the parent as the only means to rebuke a scoffer. Wisdom says to the fools "you refused me when I called, and you paid no heed when I extended my hand, you spurned all my advice, and you would not hear my rebuke."⁷ Wisdom is somehow able to rebuke all men in their foolishness, even if the parents do not. Solomon may have been able to see this wisdom more clearly because he had a good father, but wisdom does not depend on having a good father because the Law rebukes all men giving them instruction even if their parents do not because the Law is still enforced by the king and taught by the priests. Wisdom calls to men through their parents, through the priests, and through the king because each of these enforces the Law in one aspect of life.

Should a man choose to ignore wisdom, it is because he either loves simplicity, is eager to scoff, or hates knowledge. All of these must "eat the fruit of their ways,"⁸ which means that "they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of lawlessness,"⁹ another reference showing the importance of the Law in acquiring wisdom.

Ignoring wisdom's advice and rebuke seems to lead to a path of wickedness, or since it is ignoring the Law, the Path of Lawlessness. This path, willing to ignore the Law, leads through sin in many different forms to distress and calamity, and ultimately, to death. However, should the fool choose to accept wisdom's rebuke, that is obey his father and the Law, he will become a simple man. A simple man is one who obeys the Law and begins on the Path of Righteousness. Following the discipline of the Law and the instructions of his parents shows at least some measure of wisdom, even if it is a very simple wisdom. It is wise to obey, but Solomon wants to show the ability of the simple man to raise questions about the law that lead him to a deeper understanding, one that allows him to have shrewdness in dealing with practical matters.

Given that a man becomes simple by obeying the Law, and that the Law is able to teach men wisdom, it follows that the simple man can gain more wisdom by studying the Law. Through studying the Law, he will learn how it applies to the world around him, rather than simply obeying it. This understanding of the Law seems to be a basic form of shrewdness that allows the simple to question how to apply the Law in differing circumstances, and begin to judge a proper answer. A fool was one who ignored the Law, a simple man is one who obeys the Law unquestioningly, and to leave that simplicity, he must gain shrewdness by studying the Law.

Shrewdness is wisdom in practical matters, a keenness that could be used to describe either the prudent man who pursues the Good, or the cunning man who pursues his own interests. Shrewdness is a characteristic of each man in the different stages of wisdom because shrewdness is the means by which he answers the questions that he raises about the Law's practical application to men. The simple man must start to raise

⁶ Proverbs 13:1

⁷ Proverbs 1:24-25

⁸ Proverbs 1:31

⁹ Proverbs 4:17

questions and to seek answers for them, but at this early stage it is very important that he attempts to answer them through the Law itself so that he can fully come to understand the ends toward which the Law aims. Solomon reminds the reader to “accept my words and treasure up my commandments; if you make your ear attentive to wisdom and your mind open to discernment... search for discernment as for treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and attain knowledge of God.”¹⁰ This seems to be a reminder that the Law is the basis for knowledge and wisdom because the Law depends on and produces a fear of the Lord. A fear of the Lord leads men to obey the Law, and studying the Law leads men to understand that the ends for which God created the Law are good, reinforcing their fear of the Lord. Shrewdness itself, the act of answering questions about the practical application of the Law, is morally neutral, insofar as it can be used either prudentially to further the good of the Law or cunningly used in service of one’s own pride. If the shrewd man raises questions for his own ends, and attempts to answer find answers that benefit him rather than seeking the truth, then he will lead himself away from a fear of the Lord, and so, prevent himself from understanding the knowledge that the Law could have taught him. Alternatively, if in raising his questions, he maintains his fear of the Lord and “treasures up my commandments,” he will gain a general knowledge of human nature, namely that God is good and the Law He has established directs men toward God and the other goods which he has ordained for men. This general knowledge that the Law is an attempt to direct men towards those goods that God has ordained for them, and is therefore good itself, seems to be the distinguishing mark of a young man as compared to a simple man.

¹⁰ Proverbs 2:1-5

Solomon attempts to clarify further as he reminds the reader to “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.”¹¹ To rely on your own understanding is synonymous with placing your understanding of the good above God’s. Thus, a cunning man would gain an understanding of the Law, but would use the Law as a means to achieve his own ends rather than the ends for which God has established it. The cunning man who seeks his own ends falls back to the Path of Lawlessness because he has committed an act of pride. Here Solomon warns that there are “six things the Lord hates, seven are an abomination to him:” being prideful, lying, shedding innocent blood, hatching evil plots, being eager to do evil, bearing a false witness, and inciting quarrels amongst brothers.¹² Pride, the very first one, could be defined as placing your own understanding above Gods, and then judging God based on your own understanding. Judging the Law based on your own understanding of the good rather than judging yourself based on the Law’s teachings – God’s teachings – of the good is actually judging God’s understanding based on your own. The rest of these all seem to be great sins to which pride has opened the door, and so pride seems to be a very serious threat that could quickly lead a man from the path to wisdom back to foolishness and the Path of Lawlessness. The simple man must also be wary of other men who may entice him to join them in bloodshed and unjust gain, which again, he could only be susceptible to if he trusts in his own judgment of the character of the men rather than judging their character based on the Law. Besides all of this, he must be ever careful to avoid the dangers of laziness, which leads to disgrace and poverty. And yet another temptation comes in the form of the forbidden woman whose

¹¹ Proverbs 3:5

¹² Proverbs 6:13-19

“mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to Death.”¹³ The pride of trusting in one’s own judgment leads to all of these temptations that trap men in their iniquity and ultimately lead to the Path of Lawlessness; that is, to Death.

In order to avoid these dangers, the simple man must remain in the house that wisdom has built. This means that he must remain humble and obedient and continue to accept the rebuke of his parents and of the Law. He must remain steadfast and loyal in his obedience and in the fear of the Lord that grows out of that obedience. He must actively try to acquire wisdom by studying the commandments of the Law and of his father. In this manner, he will gain knowledge of God as he gains understanding of the wisdom of his instruction and discipline. Understanding the fear of the Lord will give him a certain amount of foresight and discernment to guard him on the path. By avoiding the distractions and studying the Law, he may find God’s favor, which will bring him happiness. This is the mark that he is gaining prudence and becoming a young man, rather than a cunning man who falls back onto the Path of Lawlessness. Solomon has now given a definition for the first three stages on the path to wisdom. The fool rejects the law; the simple man obeys the Law without studying it; and the young man studies the Law while still obeying it and maintaining his fear of the Lord.

Solomon also makes an important connection to political rule during this discussion of shrewdness. He suggests that this practical wisdom that can either be classified as prudent or cunning, deals with the ability

to reign. Wisdom says, “Through me kings reign and rulers decree just laws; through me princes rule, great men and all the righteous judges.”¹⁴ Solomon seems to be recognizing that this ability to apply the Law in practical circumstances is what allows men to rule well in political circumstances. However, there is still a distinction between cunningness and prudence in that the former uses wisdom to twist the Law for its own ends where the latter uses wisdom to pursue the ends of the Law. This highlights the fact that wisdom, in man, is capable of being directed towards Lawless purposes. Attempting to classify wisdom as either a tool for an end or simply an end in itself confuses the matter because it seems to be both. Wisdom, as Solomon has thus far described it, is the end which men should pursue, but also the means by which they should pursue that end. Wisdom allows men to understand and apply the Law so that they can receive more wisdom from the Law.

Obedience to the Law brings understanding of the purpose of the Law, which is to direct men towards the goods that God has intended for them; namely God himself¹⁵, wisdom¹⁶, family¹⁷, love¹⁸, prosperity¹⁹, and virtue²⁰. This allows the young man to understand the course that he must follow; “it is the wisdom of a clever man to

¹³ Proverbs 5:3-5 Given the numerous reoccurrences of this theme of the dangers of forbidden women, it seems very strange that Solomon himself seeks after forbidden women, and they are often viewed as the last straw in his turning from God.

¹⁴ Proverbs 8:15-16

¹⁵ Proverbs 2:6-8: “For the Lord grants wisdom...he is a shield for those who live blamelessly.”

¹⁶ Proverbs 3:13-18: “Happy is the man who finds wisdom...she is a tree of life to those who grasp her.”

¹⁷ Proverbs 1:8-9: The discipline and instruction of your parents “are a graceful wreath upon your head.”

¹⁸ Proverbs 12:4: “A capable wife is a crown for her husband.”

¹⁹ Proverbs 13:21-25: “The righteous are well rewarded...the wealth of sinners is stored up for the righteous.”

²⁰ Proverbs 2:21 “The upright will inhabit the earth, the blameless will remain in it.”

understand his course.”²¹ “He who loves discipline loves knowledge”²² because the discipline of the Law teaches knowledge of God. In short, fear of the Lord leads to shrewdness through discipline and obedience to the Law, and then continued obedience to the Law while also studying the Law leads to an understanding of the intent of the Law, which is to lead the Israelites to a full life in God’s favor. Understanding the intent of the Law is thereby connected to understanding God’s own intent as He desires the Israelites to live in accord with the Law so that they can gain His favor, thereby gaining happiness, and truly possess life in the understanding that Life is more than mere living, it is pursuing the goods God has ordained, and thereby becoming happy.

Knowledge of God, remember, is the defining mark of becoming a young man, but this knowledge seems to be a general knowledge that God is good. It is the knowledge that the Law encourages men to do good and keeps them from doing evil. Through study of and obedience to the Law, the young man comes to know that the Law, and therefore God, draws men to the goods that are in accord with their nature. Knowing the good, that is, knowing the end towards which the Law aims, requires realizing what the Law avoids and prohibits. A young man then has knowledge of both good and evil based on his study of the Law. It is important to remember that knowledge is merely the beginning of wisdom though; it is a characteristic that is acquired and possessed, whereas wisdom is the use of that knowledge to actually bring about the good. Cunningness, the pursuit of personal interest rather than the ends of the Law, also provides knowledge of evil through the act of twisting the Law to serve his own ends. Where the young man learns knowledge of

evil as the contrast of what the Law pursues, the cunning man learns evil through his own actions.

The knowledge of evil can be used for good by learning how to avoid doing evil and how to respond to evil in the world, or it can be used to pursue unjust gain. The cunning man has already chosen to use his knowledge of evil to pursue unjust gain, but even the prudent man could fall into this danger. Moreover, since these men have already gained a certain degree of wisdom, they are more responsible for their actions. A man with wisdom who twists his wisdom to wicked ends is worse than a simple man who remains simple and falls through calamity to death. “A twisted mind is held up to contempt.”²³ The Lord “denies the wicked what they crave,”²⁴ which suggests more of an active role against those who pervert wisdom for evil ends than those who remain in simplicity and are simply left to the fate that will befall them.

Those who pervert wisdom for their own ends actively choose the path of wickedness, and therefore, God actively frustrates their intentions because they contradict God’s intentions. These men not only bring sorrow to their loved ones,²⁵ but because their intentions are constantly frustrated, they become sick. “Hope deferred sickens the heart, but desire realized is a tree of life.”²⁶ Negligent hands, foolish speech, and arrogance produce this sickness of the heart. Negligent hands and laziness lead to poverty. Foolish speech and lies cause grief. “Arrogance yields nothing but strife.”²⁷ These are the reasons that “the produce of the wicked man makes for want.”²⁸ Poverty, grief, and strife cannot satisfy, but since these are the results of the ways of the

²¹ Proverbs 14:8

²² Proverbs 12:1

²³ Proverbs 12:8

²⁴ Proverbs 10:3

²⁵ Proverbs 10:1

²⁶ Proverbs 13:12

²⁷ Proverbs 13:10

²⁸ Proverbs 10:16

wicked, the desires of the wicked cannot be satisfied. This sickness from unfulfilled hope leads the sick man to mischief as he plots for unjust gain. The wicked man spirals downward in a loop that leads him to further pursue wickedness. He does many of those seven things that are abominations to the Lord, which leads him to death.

He does not simply doom himself, though, but also brings sorrow to his city. “A city is built up by the blessing of the upright, but it is torn down by the speech of the wicked.”²⁹ The wicked must rely on lies because he tries to deceive others for his own ends. “The way of the wicked leads astray,”³⁰ because they not only fall down the path of lawlessness themselves, but lie and lead others away from the truth as well.

The young man is not yet secure in his wisdom, though. “A road may seem right to a man, but in the end it is a road to death. The heart may ache even in laughter, and joy may end in grief.”³¹ This seems to suggest that the young man, who is attempting to pursue wisdom for the right end, can still end up pursuing the wrong path. He often gets distracted in a pursuit of vanities rather than a pursuit of further wisdom. Although wisdom leads to a realization of desires, that desire is never ceasing. For a man’s desires to cease, he must reach an end, a completeness of the pursuit for which he is searching. A man who pursues vanities can possess them for a short time, but they will never truly satisfy him because they are simply temporary things. The pursuit of wisdom, though, through obedience to the Law, is a desire that when fulfilled instills the desire for further wisdom. The desire is fulfilled by creating a deeper desire. Wisdom can never be fully possessed, which is why “the hand of the diligent wields autho-

riety.”³² It seems that wisdom requires a constant diligence, and obtaining God’s favor requires not only a diligence in the pursuit of wisdom, but a loyalty to God.

Remaining loyal to God, that is, remaining obedient to the Law and seeking the ends toward which it directs men, is being righteous. The righteous man is diligent, kind, and both gives and receives advice. He is obedient to the Law and keeps a fear of the Lord, which leads him to gain more knowledge of God. This knowledge is a realization of his desires, which brings him joy and encourages him to continue in his pursuit. The young man becomes a wise man by remaining loyal to the Law even as he gains understanding of it, which is difficult because an understanding of the Law leads to a realization of the limitations of the Law as well. A young man understands that the Law leads to a good end, but the wise man understands that the Law does not instruct him in the practical application of the Law in every circumstance. His continued study of the Law, while remaining loyal in his obedience to it allows him to see that there are gaps in the law that must be filled in by human judgment. Wisdom calls to all and directs all to itself through parents, priests, and kings. The parents lead men to wisdom while they are still simple in that they provide direction through discipline. The priests direct the young and wise men in their studies of the Law, helping to find the answers to their questions. In many ways, it is reminiscent of Aristotle’s idea that man is neither angel nor beast, but something in between the two. The parents direct the beast-like part of man’s nature in helping to curb his passions through mere obedience, and the priest directs the angelic part of man’s nature by trying to help him understand God. However, since man is neither pure beast nor angel, but something

²⁹ Proverbs 11:11

³⁰ Proverbs 12:26

³¹ Proverbs 14:12-13

³² Proverbs 12:24

where the two meet, these two aspects are not enough. The two natures meet in man, but they do not intersect and mix in a simple combination of each other. Since the Law is meant to direct men, it still leaves some questions unanswered because of the gap between these two aspects of man's nature. This is where the king becomes necessary to make judgments beyond the explicit letter of the Law to maintain its goodness in the muddled nature of man. The parents and priests were able to rule men in many aspects, but the Israelites desired a king, and so God gave them one.³³ Why did they desire a king? Because there are certain domestic disputes and foreign troubles that priests and parents – and even the judges who settled disputes before the kings – are not able to control. Many times the priests and parents would disagree with one another and had no clear authority to settle their disputes; and their only security from foreign troubles was God himself. God should have been enough for both foreign disputes and domestic unrest, but the Israelites did not trust in Him since he was not physically present, so they needed a king to provide for those political circumstances. The king, must make the judgments to secure the people that should have properly been left to God; he must act with God's wisdom. A wise man is the man who has raised questions that the Law does not answer and realized that he must act with God's wisdom.

The wise man is still capable of becoming foolish if he loses his faith in the goodness of the Law. Given that "a joyful heart makes a cheerful face; a sad heart makes a despondent mood,"³⁴ the wise man must avoid becoming sad that the Law has these limits. The wise man necessarily sees those circumstances in which he must make a judgment, and to make that judgment, he

must see both the good and the evil. Seeing both could cause him to doubt the ability of the Law to bring about the good since he also sees the evil inherit in the Law's dependence on men, who have evil in their nature. However, doubting the goodness of the Law is a form of pride by judging God's understanding of the good based on one's own, which Solomon seems to be warning against by repeating that "The Lord will tear down the house of the proud."³⁵

If instead, the wise man maintains a joyful heart and realizes that "the Lord made everything for a purpose, even the wicked for an evil day,"³⁶ then he will remain loyal to the Law and see that the Law's inability to answer every question is not a shortcoming, but actually an opportunity that allows for an even greater good. The discerning man has faith in the Law because he loves the ends toward which it aims, and so his faith leads him to realize that the Law not answering certain questions allows the king to act with God's wisdom, and even to be God's wisdom on earth. If the wise man is able to see the beauty in this duty that the Law imposes on men because it also gives them the freedom to fulfill this duty, then he can develop a true love of the Law, which will reinforce his faith in God as the Law-giver. Understanding that God's Law truly brings the greatest good to men causes him to love God, that is, to have faith. His wisdom from studying the Law and his faith allow him to trust that he can act with God's wisdom when the Law itself does not establish what is good in every particular situation, especially when political necessities arise. Such an ability promises the opportunity to do good rather than merely to follow the good, and there is a certain beauty and appeal in this that the discerning man is able to see. Seeing this beauty allows him to love the Law, not despite of the

³³ 1 Samuel 8

³⁴ Proverbs 15:13

³⁵ Proverbs 15:25

³⁶ Proverbs 16:4

questions it does not answer, but because those unanswered questions allow him to be God's wisdom. The opportunity that this provides seems to allow the discerning man to see the good to come rather than the evil that now exists. This promises that even though evil has tarnished man's very nature, there is still a pure good to come in drawing men back to the good.

This wisdom causes the wise man to become discerning as he understands God's great love for men and His desire for them to be righteous, and is able to freely return God's love with his own. He also loves the Law, and the knowledge that the Law directs men towards the good while giving them the duty and freedom to choose the good.³⁷ "Love covers up all faults,"³⁸ and thus leads to forgiveness for sins. The wise man's love then extends to those around him, and brings blessing upon them. This causes the city to prosper as his words are healing and truthful; he gives direction to those around him leading them to wisdom and a fear of the Lord. In short, he becomes concerned with the public good, fulfilling the purpose of the Law. From this, it follows that this kind of wisdom, true discernment, is the proper measure of a king because a good king must be a discerning man, which is why "there is magic on the lips of the king; he cannot err in judgment."³⁹ The king is incapable of erring in judgment if he is a true king because he has come to understand the full goodness of the Law. The king must pass judgments in areas that the Law does not give him explicit instruction, and so, it is necessary that the king understands and loves the Law so that he will remain loyal to it while acting as God's wisdom. A discerning man differs from a wise man in that he not only understands the Law and its limits, but also develops a love for the Law by

seeing its limits are themselves good for men, hence why Solomon says "the wise-hearted is called discerning."⁴⁰ A wise heart seems to be one that loves the Law while understanding it, which allows the king to make judgments freely in accordance with the intent of the Law, even when the Law does not expressly dictate what he should do.

However, it seems important to remember that "humility precedes honor,"⁴¹ and so, a truly discerning man, that is one who is righteous because he remains loyal to the Lord, never becomes haughty, but always accepts commandments and rebuke. If the wise man were to become prideful and begin to view the duty imposed on him the Law as shortcomings, thereby doubting the Law itself and even the goodness of its ends, then he will begin to hate the Law and even doubt God's own goodness. Solomon seems to be demonstrating that for the wise man to become discerning, to become truly secure in his wisdom so that "he cannot err in judgment,"⁴² he must seek love along with wisdom. "He who seeks love overlooks faults" while he who does not seek love will get hung up on the faults and evils that he sees. Thus, the discerning man is able to see and love the good in the world despite the evil he sees surrounding it because he sees the good to come, while the wise man remains at risk of hating even the good because he always sees evil with it.

Solomon has shown the progression from a fool who does not obey the Law; to a simple man who does obey the Law; to a young man who studies the law while obeying it; to a wise man who continues to obey the Law as he sees the evil that it combats in the world; all of which still are at risk of becoming fools if they should become prideful and doubt the goodness of the Law.

³⁷ Proverbs 12:1

³⁸ Proverbs 10:12

³⁹ Proverbs 16:10

⁴⁰ Proverbs 16:21

⁴¹ Proverbs 16:33

⁴² Proverbs 16:10

However, if the wise man is able to remain joyful despite seeing the evil in the world, and find the beauty in his duty to be God's wisdom on earth, he can become a discerning man.

A discerning man who loves the Law even after studying it, grows in his love, and thereby, in his fear of the Lord and obedience. He never ceases to study the Law nor to accept rebuke because he realizes that although he is wise already, "when a wise man is taught, he gains insight."⁴³ This comes through his love and loyalty to the Law, that is, to God. "He who seeks love overlooks faults,"⁴⁴ and so, he is not deterred by the evil in the world because he trusts in God's love and His ability to achieve good even from the evil. The discerning man realizes that the promise of good to come is the source of beauty,⁴⁵ and allows the beauty to draw him to that good. This is a certain humility that God's love is the only power by which to judge the world, not one's own understanding, and "the effect of humility is fear of the Lord, wealth honor, and life."⁴⁶

There is still a grave danger for a discerning man as king because it is "the glory of a king to plumb a matter,"⁴⁷ but he still must not become prideful. He reminds the discerning man to remain loving to those around him and to avoid the pitfalls on the road as he now has the prudence and wisdom to foresee them more clearly. He also reminds him that it is better to "let the mouth of another praise you"⁴⁸ than to praise yourself because it is through others that honor comes, and to seek honor is prideful. He also reminds the discerning man that "the sweetness of a friend is better than one's own counsel. Do not desert your

friend and your father's friend." The discerning man develops a habit of love and humility, one that directs him in all of his public acts. This habit of being God's wisdom will cause him to become more adept at making judgments, thereby causing him to be successful in the practical circumstances he faces; this is the adroit man. "He who trusts in the Lord shall be safeguarded... it is from the Lord that a man gets justice,"⁴⁹ and so, the adroit man is the one who has fully trusted in the Lord to receive justice in every act. His love for the Law and the Lawgiver allow him to tie his faith to his wisdom.

Solomon has provided a clear path to become a truly wise man, one who is adroit and able to act justly in every circumstance. The fool must first listen to wisdoms call and accept the rebuke of the Law, and thereby develop a fear of the Lord. That fear of the Lord will grow as the simple man remains obedient to the Law and begins to raise questions that he turns to the Law to answer. Through study of the Law, he will gain shrewdness and come to gain a general knowledge of God as the answers to his questions show him the good ends toward which the Law directs, but he also sees the evil it avoids and the limits of the Law in securing the good. A wise man can easily become discouraged by this knowledge. If he is able to supply his own wisdom to pursue a good end despite the limitations of the Law, he could easily gain pride that will ultimately lead him back to the Path of Lawlessness, but if he is able to maintain a love for the Law and its wisdom, then he will gain discernment. The discerning man is the one who has a wise-heart, and so loves the Law and remains loyal to God, maintaining his fear of the Lord even while seeing evil in the world around him. This man realizes that he is given the freedom to act with God's wisdom and bring about more good through choosing the good than

⁴³ Proverbs 21:11

⁴⁴ Proverbs 17:9

⁴⁵ Psalms 31:15-25; or Proverbs 10:28 "The righteous can look forward to joy."

⁴⁶ Proverbs 22:4

⁴⁷ Proverbs 25:2

⁴⁸ Proverbs 27:2

⁴⁹ Proverbs 29:25-27

merely obeying the good. His faith in the wisdom of the Law is a love of the Law, and as he continues to employ both his faith and wisdom, he builds a habit and becomes adroit.

CHAPTER 2: Wisdom and Discipline

Having drawn the path to wisdom, we can now plot Solomon's own life on that path. While Solomon is still in his youth, he is chosen by God to be David's successor as king of Israel. Solomon, who has spent his life in complete obedience and dedicated study, accepts this decision and simply expects it to come to pass. Solomon is already obedient to his father and to the Law, so he is already a simple man, but he will face circumstances in acquiring the throne that impress on him the need for political shrewdness.

As David grows near death, Adonijah, Solomon's older brother, attempts to take the throne. He throws a feast, inviting many of David's own captains and other sons, and has them all refer to him as king. The whole scene is reminiscent of Absalom's rebellion against David, but this is actually less of a shock because it seems natural that Adonijah would assume he, as the eldest son, should inherit the throne. However, this is an example of disobedience to King David and to God. Such disobedience, much like Absalom's rebellion, threatens the very existence of the kingdom. A political necessity has arisen, but Solomon the Simple does not have the wisdom to respond to the necessity.

Thus far, Solomon has grown up under God and David's protection, shielded from the pains and troubles of the world around him. Being a prince would have given him a first-hand experience with the political world and given him the time to dedicate to studying the Law, but it would

also take away his need to learn shrewdness since everything was taken care of for him. The first stage of wisdom, as *Proverbs* laid out, is gaining shrewdness to be able to rule. Now that Solomon has encountered evil for the first time in a way that threatens his own life, he must realize that he is simple in regards to political necessities; that is to say, he may understand the dictates of the Law, but not necessarily how to apply the Law in practical situations. Solomon's own wisdom is in being obedient to the law, which seems to lead him to think that everyone will always be as obedient as he is. This simplicity results in a lack of knowing what to do in a circumstance that requires him to act on his own judgment. His mother, Bathsheba, and the prophet Nathan are the ones who act and rectify the situation, by coming before King David to remind him of his promise to make Solomon king.

David assures Bathsheba and Nathan that he remembers his promise, and has his servants take Solomon into the public square to anoint him king over Israel publicly so all will see that David has chosen Solomon and not Adonijah. Once he returns to the palace, David has him placed on the throne, and when the news reaches Adonijah and his supporters, they flee in fear because they have been disobedient to David. Adonijah begs for mercy from King Solomon, who shows it on condition that Adonijah proves himself to be a worthy man without wickedness. Thus, Solomon is placed on the throne in the midst of this political conspiracy because of the political shrewdness of his mother and the prophet Nathan. Nathan and Bathsheba are the ones who go to King David, and David himself places Solomon on the throne. Solomon lacks the political cleverness that was necessary, but thankfully Bathsheba and Nathan supplied it. Adonijah had cunningness to win the support of the Israelites, and Nathan and Bathsheba had to use shrewdness to secure their own safety

and God's will. Since their shrewdness served both ends, it is difficult to tell if it was cunningness that happened to align with God's will, or prudence that happened to align with their own interest. Either way, Solomon simply remained obedient, but he has now seen that in politics obedience to the Law is not enough, a king also needs shrewdness to apply the Law. Solomon glimpsed the evil side of human nature in his brother's disobedience, and so realizes that as prince, he will face such political necessities where he will need to be shrewd to overcome the evil in human nature.

On the other hand, Solomon's simplicity allows him to remain peaceful, and to a certain extent, innocent. David was excluded from building the temple because he had been a warrior; Solomon is tasked with building God's temple because he is peaceful. This would seem to suggest that Solomon's lack of political shrewdness was not necessarily an evil. His obedience was a wisdom in itself, and it was through his obedience that he was able to learn shrewdness without personally taking part in it. Such an experience might make him view peaceful innocence as a sort of naivety, a simplicity that threatened the entire kingdom of Israel, but allowed him to learn shrewdness while remaining peaceful.

Now that King Solomon has inherited the throne, David presents him with his dying charge. David begins his charge by saying, "I am going the way of all the earth; be strong and show yourself a man."⁵⁰ This first phrase is strikingly similar to Solomon's own words in *Ecclesiastes* where he realizes "the way of all the earth" is death and nothing man does can prevent his death or much outlive it. Where this seems to bring Solomon grief, David viewed his purpose on earth as serving God, which is done through the continuation of Israel because Israel represents God's influence on earth

⁵⁰ 1 Kings 2:2

through God's Law. Therefore, David sees his own line as he sees himself, as the means of preserving God's Law.⁵¹ David's life has not been in vain because he has maintained God's Law on the earth for a future generation, and his line is meant to continue doing the same, and so he gives Solomon explicit instructions. As Solomon explained in *Proverbs*, the first step to becoming wise is to follow his father's instructions, and so it seems that this is the opportunity for Solomon to start down the path he has laid out.

David's charge begins, "Keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and following His laws, His commandments, His rules, and His admonitions as recorded in the Teaching of Moses, in order that you may succeed in whatever you undertake and wherever you turn."⁵² In short, obey the Mosaic Law and tradition because the Law and its tradition are wisdom.⁵³ This seems to be the exact same teaching that Solomon wished to impart upon his own son in *Proverbs*. Solomon can only fully have wisdom if he obeys the Law, which requires him to study the Law and the teachings of Moses. David's instruction, thus teaches Solomon to fear the Lord so that he can gain the wisdom and discipline necessary for success – almost exactly the same teaching that Solomon later gives. David passes on this wisdom, but it is a wisdom predicated on obedience. Wisdom is not the end or purpose, but merely a means

⁵¹ This seems to explain why, in II Samuel 6, David dances before the Ark of God that contains the covenant, the law written on the tablets, even to the disdain of Saul's daughter. His love for God's Law is so great that he worships God for having the great honor of securing it. He also desires to build a temple (which Solomon will actually build) to provide better security for God's Law.

⁵² 1 Kings 2:3

⁵³ Deuteronomy 4:5-6 "I have imparted to you laws and rules, as the Lord my God has commanded me... Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples."

of fulfilling a purpose; the purpose itself seems to be success “in whatever [Solomon] undertake[s] and wherever [he] turn[s].” David seems to be teaching Solomon that if he aligns his will with God’s, he will be successful in all of his undertakings because the tasks he chooses to undertake will align with God’s own will.

David understood his purpose to be securing God’s Law, and thereby, influence on the earth.⁵⁴ Thus, David’s definition of success is measured in those undertakings and directions that secure the Law. This could be an attempt by David to suggest to Solomon that the Law will not always explain to him the precise course of action, but it is also interesting to note that while David also learned this, he did not allow this knowledge to change his heart. If the Law were able to directly apply to every specific circumstance of life, it would seem that the role of a king would not be necessary to ensure that it is properly applied. Solomon, however, could easily see this as a promise that so long as he is obedient to God’s Law in the specific circumstance to which it applies, he will be given God’s favor to see how to apply the Law even when it is unclear.

The next several verses of David’s charge are to deal justly with those to whom David has a debt, whether that debt be one of good or evil. He tells him to be gracious in dealing with the sons of Barzillai because they were gracious and kind when David was in need. He surrounds that with two instances of telling Solomon to use his wisdom to send people to Sheol (Hell) in blood because they insulted David or spilled innocent blood, but David was unable to

punish them due to the political circumstances he faced. In fulfilling this portion of the charge, Solomon kills both Joab, David’s captain, who had killed Abner and Amasa,⁵⁵ and Shimei, who had insulted David during Absalom’s rebellion.⁵⁶ These are not the first instances of Solomon shedding blood, though.

The first man that King Solomon kills is his brother Adonijah. After his rebellion, Adonijah had sworn to remain faithful and loyal and to prove himself a good man, but then he asks Bathsheba to ask Solomon to give him Abishag for a wife.⁵⁷ This seems to be an act of cunningness on Adonijah’s part as Abishag was the virgin who comforted David before his death. Such a claim would seem to suggest an insinuation that he deserves the things of David and that he still believes he should have been king. Where David faced similar situations from the descendants of Saul, such as Shimei insulting him, and did not react, Solomon seems to have eagerly taken the lesson of the need for political shrewdness to heart, and has Adonijah put to death because he has shown that he will likely be a source of continual agitation to Solomon’s reign. Solomon also demotes the priest Abiathar from his priesthood for having supported Adonijah during the revolt. Thus, he has not only fulfilled David’s charge, but also secured his reign. In doing so, he also seems to have set a standard of justice on which to base his

⁵⁴ This is made clear by many of David’s speeches and psalms. As an example, take II Samuel 7:18-25 where David speaks with God regarding God establishing Israel as a nation and establishing David’s house as a protection for Israel to maintain the Law among the Israelites.

⁵⁵ II Samuel 3:27 and 20:10: Joab killed Abner because he had killed Joab’s brother and could have been a spy for King Saul. He killed Amasa to reclaim his command over David’s army.

⁵⁶ II Samuel 16:5 David, quite interestingly, did not allow his servants to punish Shimei at the time when he made the insults because he believed that Shimei could have been inspired by God. It would also seem, though, that since David at that moment is fighting a civil war against his own son, Absalom, it would be unwise to begin a battle with Saul’s descendants.

⁵⁷ I Kings 2:13-18

authority.

This idea of justice seems to be one of rewarding friends, as they have proven to be friends, and punishing enemies, as they have proven to be enemies, and not just your friends and enemies, but friends and enemies of your house. With an idea of justice established, Solomon now has grounds for ruling; he has established the kingdom by defining a sense of justice upon which to maintain it. Therefore, these killings seem to be of a different nature than David's wars. David's wars were conducted for the sake of acquiring the territory God had promised to the Israelites, but Solomon's punishments seem to be establishing a principle for ruling Israel. This suggests that Solomon has indeed learned some form of shrewdness, and has used it to establish a principle that will further help him to apply the Law.

Solomon has had to act in situations where the Law does not explicitly tell him what to do, such as Adonijah requesting Abishag for a wife. His shrewdness allowed him to make a decision despite the lack of instruction, based on the intent of the Law to secure the kingdom of Israel. Solomon recognizes that Israel's prosperity is one of the goods that the Law seeks. David would seemingly have reminded him that Israel's prosperity is also meant to further secure the Law, but Solomon has thus far acted within the Law. He has sought its ends, which is supported by the fact that his removal of these two men brought about God's will. Adonijah had disobeyed God in attempting to usurp the throne, and therefore, was a threat to Israel, and therefore, to God's will. Removing Abiathar fulfilled "what the Lord had spoken at Shiloh regarding the house of Eli,"⁵⁸ that the house of Eli will never be spared from iniquity. Therefore, it seems that Solomon's shrewdness still is connected to the instruction of his father, and brings about the will of God, so is prudential rather

than cunning. He uses his previous instruction and wisdom gained from studying the Law to direct the decisions that he must make outside of the Law, and his interest simply happened to correspond with God's. "Thus, the kingdom was secured in Solomon's hands."⁵⁹

Solomon then allies himself by marriage with Pharaoh, king of Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter.⁶⁰ This provided a very powerful ally to Israel and seems to be a good way to secure peace. However, it seems strange that Solomon marries purely for a political alliance rather than for love or beauty, especially considering the story of his own parents. David loved Bathsheba for her beauty so much that he committed adultery and had her husband killed so that he could marry her. They were punished for this with the death of their first son, but after David's repentance, Solomon was born to them.⁶¹ Perhaps that is why Solomon does not marry for beauty or love; he would have heard of everything that happened with his parents and may have come to believe that marrying on such grounds leads to such results. Therefore, it could be that he did not see the good of love in marriage, and actually saw that love could lead men to do evil. Therefore, it seems plausible that he could have decided marrying for Israel's security would better align with God's will than marrying for love. This also seems to show that Solomon is not able to see beauty in the same way that David did. Where David was so moved by the beauty of a single woman that he was consumed and had to have her as his wife, Solomon uses his wife to further his political measures. He still may see beauty in women, but as he later marries 1000 women, it seems that he sees only partial beauty in each coupled with imperfections, rather than seeing all of the beauty

⁵⁸ 1 Kings 2:27

⁵⁹ 1 Kings 2:46

⁶⁰ 1 Kings 3:1

⁶¹ This story can be found in II Samuel 11-12

in the world possessed in one woman who he must marry. Perhaps this is a glimpse into Solomon's heart that shows he is already less drawn to beauty than David because he is less able to see pure beauty and pure goodness, but always sees evil and ugliness tied to it.

Now that Solomon has provided for the security of Israel, he goes to God to make sacrifices, showing that he still has a fear of the Lord. This act shows that Solomon has indeed remained loyal to God thus far, but it is also seems interesting to note that he does not make the sacrifices until after he has already provided for the security of Israel by taking care of the internal threats and securing a powerful ally. He definitely still has a fear of the Lord, but he acted himself then thanked God where David went to God to ask Him to provide for the security. David even refused to act himself, instead begging God to act for him, and then also came to thank God afterwards.⁶² Solomon does not seem to show such a dependence on God, but rather seems to handle the political matters himself and then to thank God afterwards for helping him. After presenting 1,000 burnt offerings, Solomon went to sleep and the Lord appeared to him in his dream to grant him whatever he desired. Thus, it seems that God is not upset by the fact that Solomon acted on his own rather than following the example of his father because both faced different circumstances.

⁶² I Samuel 26: Even after David has been chosen by God to become king and Saul tries to kill him, David refuses to kill Saul when he is delivered into his power saying "As the Lord lives, the Lord Himself will strike him down, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go down to battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lords anointed" (v. 10-11). and; Psalms 3: David does not kill Absalom even though he incited the civil war, but instead relies on God to be a shield about him and to "slap all my enemies in the face" (v. 8).

In considering what to ask for, Solomon does not forget that God had been gracious and kind to David because he had walked before God "in faithfulness and righteousness and in integrity of heart."⁶³ Solomon clearly understands that David's righteousness and integrity procured God's favor and made David the successful and great king that he was. Yet, Solomon does not ask for a righteous heart full of integrity as David himself did. David's prayer was, "Fashion a pure heart for me, O God; create in me a steadfast spirit."⁶⁴ Instead of asking for a "steadfast spirit" Solomon seems to recognize that he is still simple in political matters. He has begun to learn shrewdness, but since he is now to be king, he needs "an understanding mind to judge [God's] people, to distinguish between good and bad."⁶⁵ Since his God given task is to rule Israel, he wants to rule Israel well.

This highlights an important difference between David and Solomon because Solomon seems to ask God for the ability to judge and interpret the Law himself, where David relies solely on God's judgment, claiming that God alone can judge the people.⁶⁶ Adonijah's attempted coup seems to have convinced Solomon that simple obedience is not enough because it is just that, simple, and a king must have the wisdom and prudence to make judgments without waiting on God. This is not to say that the importance of a righteous heart is lost on Solomon; rather, it would seem that he has a righteous heart because he wants to rule Israel well, and he realizes that he needs the political wisdom to prudently make judgments in order to rule well. He must be able to clearly distinguish between the Good and

⁶³ 1 Kings 3:6

⁶⁴ Psalms 51:12

⁶⁵ 1 Kings 3:9

⁶⁶ Psalms 7:9-10: "The Lord judges the peoples... he who probes the mind and conscience is God the righteous."

the Bad because, as king, he has the earthly authority to be the executor of the Law, and apply it in every circumstance that arises, including those that are not clearly foreseen by the Law. David, on the other hand, would have simply asked to always remain in God's will. He only realized something was wrong when God's will and favor no longer surrounded him, which he only knew depending on his circumstances.⁶⁷ After David had sinned with Bathsheba, David did not realize he was out of God's favor until Nathan accused him on God's behalf, and then he prayed, "Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity, and purify me of my sin."⁶⁸

Solomon would like to determine God's will beforehand in order to understand which decision should be made. He saw that David's life was full of distractions that had led him outside of God's favor, and he desired the prudence to avoid those same distractions. Therefore, "the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this,"⁶⁹ and so, granted him discernment in dispensing justice. It would be pleasing because it shows that Solomon desires to understand the Law better. His understanding of wisdom is one predicated on a study of the Law, so he realizes he can continue to grow in wisdom by better understanding the Law. This is so pleasing to God that he not only grants him this request, but also grants him riches, glory, and long life, which is reminiscent of Solomon's promise in *Proverbs* that wisdom "is more precious than rubies...in her right hand is length of days, in her left, riches and honor."⁷⁰

David's poetic nature that drew him towards beauty seemed to be averse to making ugly political judgments, especially

amongst God's chosen people. Since David relied on his circumstances to understand when he was in God's favor, he struggled to make difficult political decisions, such as those which he left for Solomon in his dying charge. Solomon wants the ability to avoid thinking that political unrest is some sign from the Lord by simply possessing the Lord's wisdom from the beginning. In this way, he is able to establish justice without needing to constantly vibrate into and out of God's favor. In *Proverbs*, Solomon had shown an understanding that distractions, such as those David constantly ran into, can lead men to sin, and so it seems that he is merely trying to avoid these distractions, but this seems to prevent him from having the same deep love and sense of beauty that David had in returning into God's favor. It seems that David's love for God grew from those numerous times when he was forced to turn back to God, and God accepted him back into his favor.⁷¹ Solomon seems to be avoiding these circumstances, but it seems that they would have taught David about God's ability to bring good even from his own sins.

God is pleased that Solomon is trying to avoid these distractions, but He still reminds him that "I will further grant you long life, *if you will walk in My ways and observe My laws and commandments as did your father David.*"⁷² God even rephrases Solomon's own request. Solomon asks for the ability "to distinguish between good and bad," but God reiterates it as "you asked for discernment in dispensing justice."⁷³ This minor change seems to suggest that the wisdom God is going to give Solomon, the ability to distinguish between good and bad, can be used for many purposes, but the one that Solomon should always keep in mind is

⁶⁷ Understanding when God's favor surrounds him seems simple enough in Psalms 32 where David is in pain and distress until he confesses his sin and is forgiven.

⁶⁸ Psalms 51:4

⁶⁹ 1 Kings 3:10

⁷⁰ Proverbs 3:15-16

⁷¹ Psalms 32: David finds joy in confessing his sins to God and receiving forgiveness.

⁷² 1 Kings 3:14

⁷³ 1 Kings 3:9 & 11

for the sake of dispensing justice. This wisdom will show him all of the good and evil in the world, which could lead him to new distractions that David did not have to face, but Solomon should follow the Law “as did his father David” and, if he gets distracted, turn back to God and beg forgiveness. God, therefore, recognizes the dangers that accompany this gift, but reminds Solomon that it can be the greatest gift if he uses it according to God’s will, or the worst gift if he uses it outside of its intended purpose.

When Solomon awakens, he returns to Jerusalem and holds a feast. After the feast, two Israelite women come before him with a dispute for him to judge. They both live in the same house and recently had sons, but one of the sons died. Both women claim that the living son is theirs, accusing each other of attempting to steal the others child. As king, Solomon must decide who the true mother is, a judgment that seems nearly impossible when the only two witnesses are the opposing parties. Thus, Solomon is faced with another instance of political necessity where the Law does not give him explicit instruction. He must judge between two of God’s chosen people, but the Law only instructs him far enough to know that the child should go to its rightful mother, not how to judge who the rightful mother is. Solomon gets immediately gets to test his new gift of wisdom. He calls for a sword to cut the baby in half so that each mother can have half of the baby. The real mother immediately begs him not to kill the child because she would rather another woman raise her son than witness his murder. “The other insisted, ‘it shall be neither yours nor mine; cut it in two!’”⁷⁴ Solomon is then able to tell who the real mother is, and gives her the child.

Solomon’s wisdom has given him an understanding of human nature that allows

him to make this judgment; he fully understands the good in human nature, and also the evil in it. He knows that the good will cause the real mother to love her son so much that she would rather lose him than have him die; but he also knows that the evil will cause such envy and jealousy in the pretended mother, that she would rather the child be cut in half than let someone else have the joy she was denied after her own son’s death. While all of the citizens stand in awe of his divine wisdom, Solomon may begin to start questioning if this gift was a blessing at all. In being able to judge between good and evil, he must always see the evil with the good, so that he can fully comprehend the difference and distinguish between the two. He is able to understand the good better by more fully understanding its opposite, but he can never again enjoy the purity of the good because he will always see evil connected with it. He begins to see that evil is an actual, active force in the world that impacts men’s choices. It seems like this could eventually tarnish the good itself and make it much less appealing since he knows it cannot be fully separated from evil, at least with men. Solomon will pick this theme up again throughout *Ecclesiastes* where he is unable to find anything except vanity.

It seems that this is also a theme in *Proverbs* as the young man gains knowledge of man’s nature so that he can rule justly. As king of Israel, Solomon must make judgments between men that require him to see the good and evil both; although it tarnishes his enjoyment of the good, it helps him to make those judgments. However, Solomon’s wisdom already differs slightly from that described in *Proverbs*. In *Proverbs*, wisdom finds “delight with mankind”⁷⁵ and “whoever holds on to her is happy.”⁷⁶ It seems that Solomon himself may not have found

⁷⁴1 Kings 3:26

⁷⁵ Proverbs 8:31

⁷⁶ Proverbs 3:18

happiness. Instead, it seems likely that he may begin to question how successful the Law is at drawing men to the good ends it pursues when it has gaps that he must fill with his own wisdom, which itself prevents him from enjoying the good by forcing him to see evil along with that good.

Solomon went from a simple man who obeyed the Law under his father David, to a young man who questioned the Law because it was unable to direct him explicitly during Adonijah's revolt. Once Adonijah forced Solomon to raise questions about the Law, he wanted to be able to answer any others that arose, so he turned to God and asked for wisdom. With the path that was laid in *Proverbs*, it is clear that this would all be pleasing to God, but it seems that Solomon has been given the ability to find the answers to his questions, and not yet the answers themselves. Solomon has been given a great gift of wisdom, and he has been wise in seeing that the Law places a duty on him, as king, to be God's wisdom when the law is unclear by raising questions and making judgments to draw men to the goods ordained for them.

Chapter 3: The Pavilions of Solomon

Now that Solomon is wise, he must answer questions that the Law does not, and do so based on the intent of the Law, the goods which the Law pursues. Now that he is secured as the king, he must answer these questions for himself and also for all of Israel. Remember that the nature of the king is to govern the intersection of the two parts of men's nature; he must raise men from their beast-like vices while realizing that they cannot be perfectly angelic in their virtues. This is the realm of political necessity, and there are two types of those necessities, foreign and domestic. Solomon has already dealt with some of each, but he must

continue to face them in maintaining the kingdom.

One of his first questions must have been how to structure the government, and so studying the structure could provide a glimpse into his wisdom. He has 11 officers who were primarily either the men who had served his father David, or those men's sons. Once again, trust is placed in the friends of one's family, similar to the sense of justice that emerged from David's charge. These men are also the ones who supported Solomon during the conspiracy of Adonijah, showing that these families have proven their loyalties to both David and Solomon, which suggests that they will always continue to support David's line. These officers help him manage the various aspects of the government, i.e., the church, the army, the laborers, and the prefects. His 12 prefects govern the various districts of his kingdom and as part of their positions, each must provide Solomon's food for one month out of the year, which is quite a daunting task given that for each day he required 30 oxen and 100 sheep among other things.⁷⁷ By requiring this, though, he builds a loyalty to himself. While each prefect bears the burden of supporting him for an entire month, he is then able to enjoy 11 months of joyous abundance for himself; and rather than providing a less drastic, but constant support, he provides it all at once and then is free. Further, Solomon necessarily will build a very close relationship with each of them as he will never go more than a year without spending an entire month with each of them.

With this wise structure, Solomon is able to rule a vast extent of land and accumulate a great wealth. He is able to maintain peace within his entire kingdom, answering a domestic necessity, and with all of his neighbors, answering a foreign necessity. All of the citizens live in safety and prosperity, amid which, Solomon is able to turn

⁷⁷ 1 Kings 5:2-3

his wisdom to things other than the daily ruling. Solomon's wisdom, which is greater than any other man's, allows him to compose thousands of proverbs and songs and hold discourses on the trees and beasts, and all living creatures.⁷⁸ This excessive wisdom brings him great fame and renown, without needing to fight as his father had. Also, even though he has been freed from many of the political necessities, he still does not stop raising questions in his study of the Law, but rather continues to turn to God and begins to build God's temple. Building the temple, giving God a dwelling place on earth, may have seemed to be the only promise of pure good left to Solomon since he has seen men tainted by the evil in their very nature.

King Hiram of Tyre sends some ambassadors to Solomon to greet him, as Hiram had been a friend of David, and Solomon returns them with the message that he wants to build the temple and fulfill God's task for him. This task was given to Solomon from his father, but by God, so it seem to promise the pure goodness of God Himself to come. Solomon needs Hiram's help in this matter to receive the necessary lumber. Hiram is overjoyed in receiving the offer because God has granted "David a wise son to govern this great people."⁷⁹ He recognizes that Solomon is still pursuing the good to come, even if the present good is tarnished by the evil connected to it. Hiram is therefore willing to help Solomon and they happily agree that in return, Solomon will provide Hiram's necessary provisions each year. Thus, Solomon has again formed an important ally, one that he needs for his God given task, and one that he makes dependent on him. In order to build this temple, Solomon needs men to work though, and so he imposes forced labor on his men. He raises 30,000 men to go to Lebanon and

cut the timber under Hiram's training. Yet, he does not force them all to leave, but has them go in shifts. By thus splitting the labor amongst a larger group of men, he does not upset some because they must work while their neighbors do not. Moreover, because they are not forced to leave their homes until the job is finished, but merely for a month at a time. This shows Solomon's dedication to the ends that the Law pursues as he provides that each laborer can enjoy the goods of family, love, prosperity, and happiness while still fulfilling his duty. He also has tens of thousands of men cutting stones in the quarries and carrying all of the materials back to the building site. Solomon is able to fulfill God's will, but moreover, he is able to motivate all of Israel to take part in this great task, which seems to be another domestic necessity that he is able to overcome. All of Israel now has a common goal, and one that is directly charged by God. He is thus able to not only eliminate idleness that leads men astray, but to give them a divine task, making all of Israel walk in the ways of God, without sacrificing the ends to the means.

Solomon is now able to begin building the temple 4 years into his reign. This is also 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt, which seems interesting in the simple fact that Solomon has united them to Egypt once again through his marriage, but now as an ally, not as slaves, which seems to be a major accomplishment in the realm of foreign affairs. Rather than following God's strict laws about marrying Israelite women, Solomon married a foreigner because he viewed securing Israel as God's will, which means that God's will makes allowances for those necessities that further Israel's security; he raised a question about God's Law and found an answer in the intent of the Law, rather than in the letter of the Law. This seems to show that Solomon understands political necessities as being true

⁷⁸ 1 Kings 5: 13-14

⁷⁹ 1 Kings 5:21

necessities; they are more important than the strict letter of the Law because evils are real and impose an actual necessity on men that the king must face on his own when the Law does not clearly instruct him and so might need to pursue the intent of the Law by acting contrary to the Law itself. His rule has been established, which means that David's line has been firmly established on the throne. Israel is thereby fully established, but God is not yet fully established in Israel. That seems to be Solomon's new task. David had to establish Israel so that God could dwell among a nation, and now Solomon must build God his dwelling place. In this, Solomon seems to find great glory and reverence. He sees himself as continuing David's work and seems honored to be given as great of a task as his father.

His reverence for God also shows in that he only uses precut stones to build the temple. "No hammer or ax or any iron tool was heard in the House while it was being built."⁸⁰ This intentional peacefulness demonstrates Solomon's deep respect for God; it suggests that he senses the beauty of what he is doing and the reverence that he should maintain in order to appreciate that beauty. He uses the finest stones and panels them with beautiful wood. Having studied nature as much as he has,⁸¹ Solomon would know the best wood and stone to use for such purposes. He builds the Great Hall, Portico, and Shrine, with recessed and latticed windows, and panels it all with wood that he then overlays with gold. Inside of the shrine he places two cherubim of olive wood that are intricately carved and covered with gold. The doors to the shrine and to the Great Hall are both intricately carved of wood and then covered with gold. He then brings Hiram, King of Tyre, down to build the bronze furnishings. These consisted of "the two columns, the two globes of capitals upon the

columns; and the two pieces of network to cover the two globes...the four hundred pomegranates for the two pieces of network... the ten stands and the ten lavers ...the one tank with the twelve oxen...the pails, the scrapers, and the sprinkling bowls."⁸² On top of these, Solomon also made "the altar, of gold; the table for the bread of display, of gold; the lampstands ...of solid gold; and the petals, lamps, and tongs, of gold; the basins, snuffers, sprinkling bowls, ladles, and fire pans, of solid gold; and the hinge sockets for the doors... of gold."⁸³ After all of the furnishings, Solomon also filled the temple's treasury with "the sacred donations of his father David – the silver, the gold, and the vessels."⁸⁴ Solomon's desire to make the temple exceedingly beautiful seems to be a reflection of the beautiful purpose he sees it fulfilling; providing the untarnished good of God's presence on earth.

Now that Solomon has built the temple, God again reminds him that "if you follow My laws and observe My rules and faithfully keep My commandments, I will fulfill for you the promise that I gave to your father David: I will abide among the children of Israel, and I will never forsake My people Israel."⁸⁵ God includes in this promise that he will fulfill Solomon's desires by dwelling in the temple, but only so long as Solomon remains faithful.

After spending seven years building God's temple, he spends thirteen years building his own palace. This included the Lebanon Forest House (a hall of columns coated in intricate wood), the Portico of columns, a canopy, a throne portico (the Hall of Judgment), his own residence, and the Queen's palace. Solomon then convokes the elders of Israel to bring the Ark of the

⁸⁰ 1 Kings 6:7

⁸¹ 1 Kings 5:13

⁸² 1 Kings 7:41-45

⁸³ 1 Kings 7:48-50

⁸⁴ 1 Kings 7:51

⁸⁵ 1 Kings 6:12-13

Covenant to Jerusalem from the city of David. This is a very symbolic gesture moving the Ark from the city of David to its final resting place in the temple. He has finished establishing everything for which David had striven. To celebrate, Solomon gathers everyone together for a gigantic public feast. He leads the people in making thousands of sacrifices to God while the Ark is placed underneath the wings of the Cherubim inside the Shrine. By so doing, Solomon continues to lead the people towards God as they also bring the Law, inside the Ark that cannot be touched, into the Holy of Holies, that cannot be entered (except for the high priest), and place them under two menacing cherubim to protect it.⁸⁶ Clearly, Solomon still has a respect for the Law, even if he has seen its limitations.

The services cannot be completed though because the temple is filled with a cloud of the presence of God that interrupts the priests during their ceremonies. God's physical presence has come on earth; He is pleased enough with the temple that Solomon has built that He is willing to dwell on earth amongst the Israelites. Solomon immediately blesses God for fulfilling His promise to David by dwelling amongst the Israelites. Solomon recognizes that now Israel has been fully established because God had given them the land, David had secured the land, and now Solomon had built the temple and created a dwelling place for God's presence. In this way, he seems to understand that Israel has been fully established and that God has been fully established in Israel. The good that he has been pursuing for 20 years is now realized. However, Solomon seems to view his task as being complete, that he has successfully built God's dwelling place, and so now he has fulfilled his duty. It seems that he ex-

pects God's presence to change the nature of his kingship, that he should no longer face political necessities.

Solomon turns to God's presence in the temple and prays to God in front of all of Israel. "There is no god like You, who keep Your gracious covenant with Your servants when they walk before You in wholehearted devotion."⁸⁷ Solomon also asks that God always reward good and punish evil, reminding us that the Law calls to everyone to come to wisdom and to obey it. The prayer also casts a glimpse into Solomon's heart. He has asks God to fulfill the responsibility that has been placed on Solomon as the king, suggesting that he has already despaired in his own ability to raise men to virtue. Throughout his entire prayer, Solomon is calling on God to fulfill Solomon's own expectations. His prayer is that God might act in a certain way that is in accord with Solomon's desire, not that the Israelites, or even Solomon himself, might act in accord with God's will. David had also prayed that God give him a pure heart and redeem him from sin,⁸⁸ but he was not calling on God to fulfill his own expectations; he was trying to fulfill God's desires.

When David had brought the Ark to Bethlehem, David praised God and charged all the Israelites to "Praise the Lord; call on His name ... Turn to the Lord, to His might; seek His presence constantly ... Be ever mindful of His covenant ... Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name, bring tribute and enter before Him, bow down to the Lord majestic in holiness. Tremble in His presence, all the earth!"⁸⁹ David believed that, while men are surrounded in sin, they can make the choice to turn back to God, who will then show grace and save them from their sin, but they must make this small

⁸⁶ All of this seems to portray an idea similar to that of Lycurgus or Solon that the law is eternal and cannot be changed.

⁸⁷ 1 Kings 8:23

⁸⁸ Psalms 51:12

⁸⁹ 1 Chronicles 16

choice. Solomon does not believe that men can make such a choice so long as they are surrounded by sin; men cannot overcome their evil nature even enough to make the choice to do good. The history of Israel has been one of men being given a chance to choose the good, but instead choosing the evil. Having studied this, Solomon concludes that the general tendency of men is to fall into this temptation. Even if specific men, such as his own father, are able to overcome this to a certain extent, the general mass of mankind cannot.

Solomon sees the evil in everything –“There is no man who does not sin.”⁹⁰ Because he sees sin in every man, he believes men’s attempts to be righteous are futile, which seems to be raising a question as to the very ability of the Law to lead men to what is good, at least without the direct intervention of God. His answer seems to be that men have so much evil in their nature that the Law does not necessarily lead them to good on its own, and he himself struggles to be God’s wisdom because he does not see any pure good in men. However, he has maintained his faith because he has had the promise of God dwelling on earth and being His own wisdom on earth, which he believes will fulfill his expectation of the good to come. Solomon kept his faith in God, which has allowed him to reject the Law as an imperfect tool in his own hands, while accepting that it will be made perfect in the proper hands. Now that God actually dwells on earth, He can use the Law Himself to combat evil. Solomon seems to believe that evil should be completely eliminated.

By seeing sin everywhere, he does not believe that he can act righteously, as David had always asked to, but instead asks God to be faithful and forgiving in spite of Israel’s failures. “May He never abandon or forsake us;” not “may we never abandon or

forsake Him.”⁹¹ Ultimately, he does not think that men can rule themselves. He does not think that men can control their inclinations or passions. “May [God] incline our hearts to Him, that we may walk in all His ways.”⁹² Solomon does not believe men can turn their own inclinations to walk in God’s ways, nor that men can walk in God’s ways if it is contrary to their inclination. His great wisdom has shown him so much evil in human nature that he has begun to lose faith in men. He is still reliant on God since God is the only one capable of making men righteous; however, Solomon thinks that for men to be righteous, they can no longer sin. God’s making men righteous should eliminate all of the evil in men’s nature; there should be no more evil that Solomon must face as king. Solomon believes that God alone is able to make men righteous, and only through His own will and His own acts, that is, through grace, so the Law almost seems to become moot in Solomon’s mind. Men are not able to eliminate the evil in their own nature, so the Law cannot even draw them to virtue. God must incline their hearts in order for them to act in any way that is not evil.

After Solomon has finished building the temple and his palace, he has completed everything that he “had set his heart on constructing.”⁹³ God reappears to him for the second time and gives him the same promise that if Solomon remains faithful to Him, then He will maintain Solomon’s line on the throne forever.⁹⁴ This time, though, he also adds a warning that if Solomon or his descendants are not faithful, if they serve other gods, He will reject Israel and the temple that Solomon has built, and will not

⁹¹ 1 Kings 8:57

⁹² 1 Kings 8:58

⁹³ 1 Kings 9:1

⁹⁴ God appeared to him twice, here and at Gibeon (3:4-14) but His voice came to Solomon a third time while he was building the temple (6:11-13).

⁹⁰ 1 Kings 8:46

maintain Solomon's line. It seems that God is able to recognize that Solomon's heart has begun to change. This comes right after Solomon's prayer that showed his despair at the evil of human nature and the lacking of the Law. Therefore, it seems that God is reminding Solomon that the Law does direct men towards what is good, and men, including Solomon, actually have the ability to do good and to be righteous despite of the evil in their nature.

The past 20 years, the first 20 years of Solomon's reign, he spent building the temple and his palace, completing his charge from David. Now that his charge has been completed, his only task is to rule Israel, to maintain the Law and people that Moses established in the kingdom that David established. Solomon had hoped that God's presence would eliminate evil entirely, and thereby any further political necessities that he would have had to face as king. Solomon views this as being the completion of his God given task. Now that he has paid his father's debts, and he has provided God a dwelling place on earth, it seems that God should be able to handle ruling men's souls and ensuring that the Law is applied to draw men to the good. Solomon can now leave God's Law to God. In a strange way, bringing God closer to Israel seems to have caused Solomon to stray further from God himself and so he no longer studies the Law because the Law cannot bring about a pure good, only God himself can.

Solomon then proceeds to give Hiram 20 cities as a gift of gratitude. When Hiram visited the towns, though, he was displeased with them, saying that they were nothing.⁹⁵ However, rather than getting angry or seeking vengeance, Hiram sent Solomon gold as a reciprocal gift of friendship. Solomon thereby establishes another ally, now being allied with both Egypt and

Tyre. Solomon continues to improve the security of his kingdom by now using his forced laborers to fortify several towns. In this way, Solomon continues to act as a king in providing for the security of his people. He has brought God to dwell on the earth by building His temple, but even when God's presence is physically on earth, Solomon must still see to the political necessities of ruling. It seems that Solomon found God's presence on earth did not change the nature of political necessities; the king must still face the evils of the world.

God's presence on earth does not eliminate evil entirely. Solomon still must rule as king, and still faces the necessities that arise because of the evil in man's nature. The good that God's presence has brought does not seem to be as pure as Solomon would have hoped. Solomon has now finished every aspect of his father's charge, he has completed everything that God has explicitly charged him with doing. Not only does this remove any clear and definite goal for Solomon's life, but it also takes away the only future good that is pure. Solomon's wisdom has been causing him to see the evil that is necessarily tied to good, especially in political necessities where he must judge which circumstance is the better of two evils. Throughout his entire life Solomon has been able to look at his God given task, his father's charge as a promise of untarnished good to come even if all present good is tarnished. Solomon has now brought about this good, but it did not eliminate the other evils, so he must return to managing Israel, to dealing with political necessity after political necessity. The good of God's own presence which he has so long awaited is itself tainted because it is still imperfect at combating evil. Moreover, there is no longer any further promised good to come, so Solomon loses his ability to see any beauty in the good, which will ultimately leads him to turn from the Law

⁹⁵ 1 Kings 9:13

and God.

At this point, Solomon has spent 20 years pursuing a good that did not fulfill his hopes. He used his judgment to build his wisdom and seek the good, to build God's dwelling place, but everything he has built has seemingly been in vain. Even the Wisdom that he possesses, which he may view as something that he has built himself through his own great labors, is futile because it just caused him to see the evil in the world. However, all of this is based on Solomon's own judgment of what the good must be rather than based on God's promises. Solomon's wisdom had led him to understand the goods for man, which according to the Law included God Himself, but since God is incapable of securing the good by eliminating evil, Solomon begins to doubt whether God truly is a good for men.

During this time, he also reduces the non-Israelites to slavery in order to maintain a slave force for his labors, sacrificing the ends which the Law had pursued. Seemingly, he has come to doubt whether the ends are even good themselves since they were ordained by God, who he has concluded is not good. He began by understanding that God is good, and that Israel was God's instrument on earth that He could use to bring about the good. As Solomon realized the limitations of the Law and the evil in human nature, he concluded that the duty which the Law imposed on him as king was to build God's dwelling place on earth, to build the temple. Solomon thought that if he built the temple, he would fulfill his duty to draw men to the good because God would then be able to do so Himself, removing the duty to raise men to the good from the king. Moreover, once he has fulfilled his duty, he should no longer have a duty and should no longer find evil in the world. Since he does still find evil in the world and still has a duty to fulfill in making political judgments, Solomon concludes that God is unjust.

This is also when his wife, Pharaoh's daughter, moved into the palace that he had built for her. He then built a citadel and a fleet of ships for over-seas commerce. Solomon also continued "to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices of well-being three times a year...and he kept the House in repair."⁹⁶ This could be Solomon's hopes that in remaining faithful, God may still eliminate the evil in the world and fulfill Solomon's desires, but it is also a necessity for him. As the king of Israel, he must at least maintain the appearance of faith to maintain Israel's security and to set an example for others because the Law, despite its shortcomings, is still better than lawlessness and anarchy in the kingdom. But if Solomon's faith is mostly just an appearance, it will only be a matter of time before he turns from God entirely.

The queen of Sheba then comes to visit Solomon because she heard of his fame. She brings with her many rare and valuable gifts and tests Solomon's wisdom with hard questions. Solomon was able to answer every question she had well enough that she was amazed by his wisdom. All of his wisdom and wealth left her breathless. She had heard reports of his greatness, but the reality surpassed the reports she had received. She even comments on how fortunate all around him are to benefit from his wisdom. She also reminds him that "It is because of the Lord's everlasting love for Israel that He made [Solomon] king to administer justice and righteousness."⁹⁷ It is interesting to note, though, that she does not call Solomon himself fortunate, but Israel and those around him, which might suggest that she can already see that he has fallen into despair.⁹⁸ Solomon has lost his faith in

⁹⁶ 1 Kings 9:25

⁹⁷ 1 Kings 10:9

⁹⁸ This story is rather similar to one that Plutarch tells in the life of Solon. Croesus, a rich and powerful king, had invited Solon to witness his great

the Law's ability to lead men to the good, but still must maintain the Law in Israel, which would jeopardize Solomon's love for Israel itself. Still, she leaves him a great gift for the pleasure of having witnessed everything. He, in return, gives her everything she desires before she returns, thus giving Solomon another ally.

Solomon also begins to receive annual dividends from his commercial fleet that bring him 666 talents of gold every year, on top of his other annual tributes. He uses all of his gold to make decorative shields for the palace, and to build a throne so grand that "no such throne was ever made for any other kingdom."⁹⁹ It was made of ivory and overlaid with gold. Six steps led up to it and there was a lion beside each arm and two lions on each step. Solomon's utensils were all made of pure gold. He was so wealthy and opulent that silver was worthless because of the amount of gold that he possessed. His wealth and wisdom so excelled all other men that his fame continued to grow and bring more men to come and witness it for themselves. Each also brought a yearly tribute for the king. Solomon also procured the best horses that money could buy for his chariots and for all the kings of the land Solomon possessed. This shows Solomon's prosperity that God promised to him, and also his continuance in securing Israel with the best resources and well fitted allies that would remain loyal to him since he was so beneficial to them. God had already been providing him an abundance of more than he needed, but Solomon built the fleet and established tributes to continue to increase his wealth even more. God had promised him riches "the like of which no king has ever had," but Solomon

has already allowed pride to turn him from God, so this almost seems to be a further act of pride.¹⁰⁰ In *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon even acknowledges that it was by his own desire; "my thoughts turned to all the fortune my hands had built up, to the wealth I had acquired and won," but he soon discovered that "it was all futile and pursuit of wind; there was no real value under the sun!"¹⁰¹ Solomon had lost any pure good to pursue, so began to search for other goods that might fill this void, but discovered riches are futile. He also realizes that "'the fate of the fool is also destined for me; to what advantage, then, have I been wise?' And I came to the conclusion that that too was futile, because the wise man, just like the fool, is not remembered forever...both are forgotten. Alas, the wise man dies just like the fool!"¹⁰² Solomon has lost sight of any good or beauty at all in the world, even in wisdom itself.

Solomon began to love foreign women other than Pharaoh's daughter; women from the nations that God had forbidden the Israelites to marry. He marries 700 women and has another 300 concubines on top of his wives, totaling 1000 women that he loved. Solomon could not find the good he desired within the Law, so he is searching for it outside of the Law, in the forbidden women. The sheer number of women Solomon married suggests that he cannot find the beauty he is seeking here either. Rather than finding one woman as being truly beautiful, he sees that each one is beautiful in some ways and ugly in others, so he has to marry several so that each one can fill in some piece of beauty that another lacks. To please these women, he begins to build shrines to their native gods and sacrifices to them. Thus, Solomon, after all of the glory, wealth, and wisdom God has provided

happiness, but Solon rather warned him to look to the end of his life "and not rely and grow proud upon uncertainties." – Plutarch, *Lives*, The Modern Library - Dryden Translation, pg. 115

⁹⁹ 1 Kings 10:20

¹⁰⁰ 1 Kings 3:13

¹⁰¹ Ecclesiastes 2:11

¹⁰² Ecclesiastes 2:15-16

for him, turns his heart completely and worships other gods. Solomon concluded that his God was unable to provide the pure good that he desired, so he tries to find another god who can. The Lord grows angry with Solomon and decides to tear the kingdom away from him and give it to one of his servants. However, God still remembers his love for David, and so allows Solomon to reign for the remainder of his life because of his promise to David, and instead of tearing the entire kingdom away from Solomon's son, he allows him to keep a portion of it.

God raised up old enemies of David. There were several men who had been driven from their homes as children when David defeated their fathers, who God now caused to seek their vengeance against Solomon. God also incites one of Solomon's servants, Jeroboam, to rise against him by choosing him to rule the part of the kingdom that will be taken from Solomon's son. All of Solomon's work in securing the kingdom and forming powerful allies came to naught because he turned against the Lord and did not love the Law. He allowed his pride to cause him to judge God's goodness instead of aligning his own understanding with God's promise, and that pride led him to the path of Lawlessness, which led to his death and the destruction of everything to which he had dedicated his life.

Ultimately, it seems that Solomon began his life as a simple man, obedient to the Law through his father David, and then when his brother, Adonijah, attempted to revolt, Solomon was forced to begin to raise questions about the Law. Thus becoming a young man, Solomon realized that he needed wisdom to direct him down the path of his studies, and so asked God to give him that wisdom. As he continued to use that wisdom to raise and answer questions, his study of the Law taught him about human nature, but rather than seeing the good of which man was capable, Solomon constantly

saw the evil that was attached to that good. Even at man's best, whatever he did would be temporal and ultimately become futile, and so Solomon began to doubt the ability of the Law to lead men to good. As he continued to study the Law, he found that it did not explicitly direct men to good in all circumstances and men needed to apply wisdom beyond the Law in some cases, thus becoming a wise man. Despite his doubts, Solomon saw the beauty of the promised good in God's presence on earth, so he dedicated his life to build the temple and secure God's presence. Such dedication shows a love for the ends that the Law sought and a faith in God that are the early marks of becoming a discerning man, but he did not find beauty in the Law giving him the responsibility to do good, which is the true mark of a discerning man. The discerning man sees that turning from evil to good, and helping others do so, is a good in itself, the promise of which is beautiful. He allowed his pride to foster doubts and then judged God based on his own understanding of the good.

In *Proverbs*, Solomon had seen the gap in the Law's explicit direction of men as an opportunity for men to have the freedom to choose good, but in his own life, Solomon seems to have viewed it as an evil and a shortcoming. By not becoming a discerning man, Solomon ultimately fell to the path of Lawlessness, and abandoned both the Law and God. Solomon lost sight of beauty and goodness because in dealing with political necessities, every good in the world was also tarnished with some evil circumstances. Even God's presence did not change the fact that "alongside justice there is wickedness, alongside righteousness there is wickedness."¹⁰³ Ultimately Solomon concludes that "the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous, and for the wicked; for the good and pure, and for the impure... that is the

¹⁰³ Ecclesiastes 3:16

sad thing about all that goes on under the sun: that the same fate is in store for all.”¹⁰⁴ He lost sight of the fact that he noted in *Proverbs* that “the Lord made everything for a purpose, even the wicked for an evil day,”¹⁰⁵ which was what allowed the wise man to maintain a love for the Law. Solomon sees all evil as tarnishing the good so that no good can be pure. He allows his own understanding of what the good should look like to prevent him from trusting in God’s ability to use evil for good. Solomon judged God by his own wisdom, the ultimate act of pride, and it led him to despair.

CONCLUSION

Solomon pursued wisdom and gained more wisdom than any other man, but he still lost his faith and turned from God. His life seems to provide a grim outlook for those who want to hope that wisdom and faith can be combined. *Ecclesiastes* concludes that “The sayings of the wise are like goads, like nails fixed in prodding sticks ...Against them, my son, be warned: The making of many books is without limit and much study is wearying of the flesh;” rather, all that men need to do is “Revere God and observe His commandments!”¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, Solomon’s great wisdom has led him to believe that wisdom and faith are incompatible, but wisdom is the greater evil of the two because wisdom by itself leads men to understand the goods for men, but does not necessarily show men that God is the ultimate good, the cause of the goodness in those other goods. Wisdom, by itself, while leading men to understand the goods for men, can allow men to deny that God is one of these goods Himself. Solomon seems to warn that men would be better remaining

simple in their faith than pursuing wisdom that will tarnish that faith and ultimately destroy it.

Solomon had even drawn the path to a wisdom that combined with faith in *Proverbs*, but could not follow that path in his own life. Solomon followed the path, but still lost his faith. However, in reviewing the path that he laid out and charting his life against that path, it seems that Solomon did not actually remain on the path. He knew from the onset that the path was precarious, and he laid out some of the specific dangers that lay in store for any man who attempts to follow the path, but he himself then fell prey to those evils. He allowed pride to enter into his life as he made judgments and acted with wisdom, and so he began to judge God based on his own wisdom. Solomon’s life brightens the flame of those beacons that shine a warning of the path to avoid, but when combined with the path he laid out in *Proverbs*, the more light that we shed on the path, perhaps the easier it will be for the next traveler.

Solomon began his life as a prince, born to King David and raised to study the Law and become king. Having received this special training, it seems that Solomon could easily come to believe that he had a special authority that no other man could possess. He was bred to be God’s wisdom on earth, so when he struggled to find the good while making practical judgments among men, then no man could do so. As an example of a man with the opposite belief, David himself was born a shepherd and had to rely on God to give him the strength to fight lions, bears, and even the giant Goliath.¹⁰⁷ Having been raised completely reliant on God, David seems to have learned that God can use any man to bring about the good, where Solomon’s childhood seems to have already opened the door for a small degree of pride

¹⁰⁴ Ecclesiastes 9:2-3

¹⁰⁵ Proverbs 16:4

¹⁰⁶ Ecclesiastes 12: 11-13

¹⁰⁷ 1 Samuel 17

that made him believe he had a special ability and authority that no other man could possess.

David had also lived his life without the shrewdness and caution that Solomon seems to have had. Rather than carefully avoiding the many dangers along the road, David allowed himself to be moved by a passionate desire for beauty in ways that even led him away from God. However, because he was so moved by beauty, he was able to find a beauty even in turning back to God, in returning to justice and goodness. This idea of beauty in becoming good, in becoming pure, seems to have allowed David to trust in God's promises that even the wicked serve a purpose, and God will bring good even from wickedness. Solomon, however, does not seem to see this same goodness. His caution to avoid the dangers along the path actually seem to have caused him to believe that true goodness cannot exist wherever evil exists; the two are contradictions, so the existence of evil tarnishes any good that he can find.

There was one source of untarnished good throughout Solomon's life though, namely fulfilling his father's charge and bringing about God's presence on earth. Solomon dedicated the first 20 years of his reign to pursuing this good, devoting his life to the only true beauty that he could find, the only pure good left after his discovery of evil in human nature. He had tried to use the Law to bring men to good, but since the Law was applied by men onto men, no matter how perfect it was, it had to combat the evil in their nature. Since the Law could not completely eliminate evil from man's nature, that duty fell to Solomon. The discerning man would have seen this duty as an opportunity to actively do good in the world, and would have found beauty in this chance to raise men to virtue. Solomon does not seem to have found this beauty though. He struggles in finding the good in human nature because even the best of man's nature

is still inherently connected to evil. He sees that even a man who is virtuous, beautiful, and young now, only enjoys these goods temporarily before he becomes old, ugly, and often vicious. Solomon despairs because he faces a constant stream of political necessities where he must choose the lesser of two evils, and cannot find any pure good in the world.

Solomon therefore dedicates his life to bringing about pure good in the world by building a dwelling place for God. In his mind, this provides goodness a dwelling place on earth, and he seems to believe that the Law, which was imperfect when executed by men, can become perfect as it can now be executed by God. Solomon understands the responsibility that the Law has imposed on him as a duty to bring God to Israel, rather than bringing Israel to God. Solomon desires to see evil completely eliminated from the world, but when God's presence does not do so, he is thrown into utter despair, and finding his whole life futile, he turns to other ends that may provide the good he desired. This ultimate act of pride, of judging God's understanding of the good based on his own understanding of what goodness should look like in actualization, was the final turning point of Solomon. Because Solomon could not see the beauty that his father had found in turning evil into good, of drawing men from their evil nature to their better, but still imperfect nature, Solomon despaired and betrayed God in ignoring his own duty as king, and ultimately, in worshipping other gods.

Solomon's life does not make the path to wisdom any clearer than he had made it in *Proverbs*. However, Solomon himself, when traveling the path he had drawn, neared the end perhaps more closely than any other man. He did not rely on mere faith, nor mere wisdom, but trusted in God to bring about the good as he understood it through his wisdom, and so built the temple

and dedicated his life to pursuing that good. However, Solomon, while drawing so near to his destination of becoming a discerning man, ran into the rocks of pride that caused him to sink before reaching the harbor securely. Solomon's pride prevented him from trusting that God could bring good from evil; it kept him from seeing that God created man with a beautiful nature that allows him to choose to do good rather than merely obey, and instead caused him to see man's nature as evil, and ultimately, therefore, God Himself as evil for thus creating man without any hope of achieving the good. Let Solomon's life, then serve as a beacon that shines from atop those rocks of pride and warn any fellow traveler to avoid their dangers.

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