

Solomon & His Wisdom, II

We want to continue in 1 Kings 2 in this session and then move rapidly into the subsequent sections. When we met last, we were talking about David's charge and the fact that it seems to involve two components. The second component involves adding to God's charge in some way as David had said to Solomon, "You are a man of wisdom. You will know what to do."

For the rest of 1 Kings 2 we discover that Solomon, having received his father's charge, begins to take charge. In the remainder of chapter 2 beginning in verse 13, we read about Solomon's first 100 days as king. We talk about that with newly elected presidents or politicians. We do not know that this is 100 days, but metaphorically speaking, these are Solomon's initial acts. Adonijah makes the silly mistake of asking for Abishag's hand in marriage and instead loses his life over that deal. What in the world would have behooved Adonijah to do that? It was a vain attempt one more time to make a bid for the throne. It was not very smart. Maybe he was actually smitten with this woman to the extent that he was willing to risk something so foolish. Bathsheba was more than happy to pass on his request to Solomon, perhaps realizing how Solomon would react and thus eliminate a dangerous rival. We do not know, but Adonijah first loses his life. Abiathar is removed from the priesthood in keeping with the judgment that had been spoken against the house of Eli in 1 Samuel 2. Joab flees when he hears what is going on and that Adonijah has lost his life. Joab flees to the altar and holds on to the horns of the altar, but he is killed there anyway. He makes the comment that if Solomon is going to kill him, he is going to have to kill Joab where he is. That report is brought to Solomon and Solomon says, "Do as he says." This was something of a breach, but Solomon is eliminating dangerous rivals, or so he thinks.

Zadok replaces Abiathar. Shimei is confined. When he breaks his confinement after some lapse of time he is ultimately killed. At the end of 1 Kings 2, we read that the kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon's hands. One thing we talked about in terms of reading biblical narrative is to be alert to repeated words or phrases and to variation, even if it is slight variation in the repeated matter. This is repeating something that we read earlier. In 1 Kings 2:12 it says, "So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established." If you were to look at that in the Hebrew and translate it accordingly, you could say "his rule was very firmly established." The adverb "very" is the Hebrew word *mehode*, which comes at the end. So the kingdom was established *mehode*, exceedingly. This is before Solomon has lifted a hand. It is before Solomon acted according to his own wisdom. The kingdom is very firmly established. However, he then begins to act according to his own wisdom. By the end, the kingdom was firmly established, not "very firmly established" this time. There is no *mehode*, but "the kingdom was now established in the hand of Solomon." That "in the hand of Solomon" could, in this context, more appropriately be translated, "by the hand of Solomon." The preposition translated "in" in Hebrew means "in, with, or by." It has those three connotations and the construction *behad*—in, with, or by the hand of—is often used to express the agency through which something is done. The final verse of chapter 2 might read, "The kingdom was now established by Solomon's hand," perhaps in distinction to the very firmly established kingdom that he already enjoyed. He has begun to act according to his own wisdom.

Then we come to 1 Kings 3. This chapter records God's first appearance to Solomon. He will appear to Solomon again later. It is interesting to reflect on what happens in chapter 3 in the light of what has happened before. As the chapter begins, the first three verses are a bit perplexing. They do not seem to get right to the point, but I think they are very, very important. Let us read those first three verses. I think they describe Solomon's state or status as Chapter 3 opens. Beginning in verse 1, "Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David

until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.” Then we get into the meat of the chapter. The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, and there God will appear to him.

Let us talk about these first three verses. Why are they included here, and what do they have to teach us? Perhaps Solomon is still acting according to his own wisdom. He marries Pharaoh’s daughter. That raises a red flag. Deuteronomy 7:3 forbids the marrying of foreign women; likewise the Law of the King, Deuteronomy 17:17, forbids the accumulation of wives. Here we see Solomon marrying Pharaoh’s daughter. The narrator simply tells us but does not comment on it. He leaves it for us to sense the red flag. Perhaps Solomon is acting according to his wisdom.

Let us look at what is said about the people. “The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD.” There are unfinished houses. Solomon is in the process of building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and both are unfinished. Because they are unfinished, the people are finding themselves still sacrificing at the high places. This was forbidden in Deuteronomy 12:1 and following. The people were not to sacrifice at such high places.

In 1 Kings 3:3 it says, “Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.” How does that statement strike you? Hopefully you thought, “He should have been walking according to the statutes of God instead of according to the statutes of David.” Interesting, it sounds almost the same. It is almost a repetition of what David’s charge had been. But, if you really compare the two, you discover that David had actually said to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:3, “Observe what the LORD your God requires: walk in his ways and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses.” David was talking about the statutes and decrees of God as recorded in the Law of Moses. Indeed they had been incorporated into David’s charge and yet, as we saw, David’s charge was something of a mixed bag. He did some good, some not so good. Solomon is showing his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father, David.

I hate to keep enriching the text by referring to the Hebrew text, but another way to understand 1 Kings 3:3 is to say, “Solomon loved the Lord enough to walk according to the statutes of David, his father.” In other words, there is a usage of that particular preposition that is used here with an infinitive that expresses degree. This is the degree to which Solomon loved God. Solomon loved God enough to walk according to the statutes of his father, David.

On the surface it seems pretty favorable and positive, but under the surface it makes us a little uneasy, particularly as we back-read. The first time through, if you have never read this story before, it seems that things are going pretty well. Most of these things pass us by, but when we back-read, we begin to think something was going wrong, even there.

There is no indication here that Solomon is sacrificing or burning incense to false gods. In fact, from the rest of the chapter, we would get the impression that he is sacrificing to the Lord. Maybe that is an assumption on our part. We are not expressly told. The issue was that the people themselves were not to offer sacrifices on these high places. Even if they were worshipping Yahweh in those high places it was wrong because of the association of those high places with Canaanite worship. There is temptation toward syncretism and bringing things into the worship of God that would have been inappropriate.

As we come to 1 Kings 3:4 we need to recall those first two chapters. The first chapter showed us the ambiguity of human actions and the necessity for us to pay close attention to what we are reading. Chapter 2 suggested the importance of accepting God's charge and not adding anything to it. As we come to chapter 3, we find in those early verses indications that Solomon is beginning a foreign alliance. He married a foreign woman, a daughter of Pharaoh. The houses are unfinished; therefore, the people are sacrificing on the high places. Solomon himself is doing so. He loves God enough to walk according to the statutes of his father, David, but as was pointed out, he should have been walking according to the statutes of God, pure and simple. These little things, if we are looking for them, begin to make us ask some questions.

As we encounter Solomon it is very interesting to see the way he is feeling at this particular time. In 1 Kings 3:4 we read of Solomon going to Gibeon to offer sacrifices. Why did he go to Gibeon? Go back to Joshua 9:22-27 where the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them. "Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, 'Why did you deceive us by saying, "We live a long way from you," while actually you live near us? You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.'" Perhaps it was the association of the curse that had been placed on the Gibeonites that led to the assumption that Gibeon is an appropriate place to go to worship. So, Solomon went there.

It was at Gibeon, in 1 Kings 3:5, that "the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.'" Here is an example of God's grace to one, as we will rapidly discover, who is feeling very much in need. Solomon's reply in verse 6 is interesting. He says, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart." There is something a little too meritorious in that expression. That was not the reason God had shown kindness to David. It was because of God's free choice that He showed kindness to David. Nevertheless, He had shown kindness to David, his father. Solomon continues, "You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties." What caused Solomon to say that particular thing to the Lord here? He probably said it because it was his first 100 days. He already had blood on his hands. He had begun to act according to his wisdom. As Ian Provin points out in his commentary on Kings, the place to start talking about wisdom in the life of Solomon is in chapter 2. Solomon had wisdom of his own, but we see in chapter 2 where that already got him. He has blood on his hands, so he comes to a moment of soul searching and realization. He says, "I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties."

We can compare Solomon's human wisdom with the same kind of wisdom that David experienced in 1 Samuel 27:1 when it says, "David thought to himself, 'One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines.'" It is a human wisdom or pragmatism kicking in. They both thought, "I better do something here or things could really fall apart in a hurry." This is especially true of Solomon's wisdom. It is interesting that human wisdom is introduced in the story of Solomon because we will see that there is a playing back and forth between God-given wisdom and human wisdom. Solomon was a clever man already who had some smarts of his own before he came to this particular juncture in his life.

At this point God in His grace comes to Solomon and says, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." What a tremendous thing. After those initial 100 days that were not so pleasing to God, God does not get frustrated and give up. Instead He comes and says, "Solomon, what can I do for you? Can I help

you?" I find it very encouraging when I have been blowing it for a while to know that God may come to us and say, "What can I do to help you?"

Solomon does a good thing here. He recognizes, "I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties." He then requests in 1 Kings 3:8, "Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" Solomon made a good request in response to this gracious offer of God. He said, "I do not know how to carry out my duties. Give me a discerning heart."

When we think of Solomon we think of wisdom. When we use the word wisdom we think of wise living. But when Solomon asks for a discerning heart, the word "heart" is often translated "mind." He is asking for discernment. Give me a discerning mind that I may govern Your people. I think he is saying, "God, I do not know what I am doing. I am a little child. Make me competent. Give me what I need to be able to carry out this task."

God is pleased with this request. It says in 1 Kings 3:10 that the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. He was pleased because it was not a selfish request. It was a request aimed at providing good government for God's people. The Lord was pleased with Solomon that he had asked for this, so God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have you asked for the death of your enemies,"—perhaps a slight barb there; some of them are already dead—"but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart." That is a wise and clever mind. I will make you good at what you do, "so that there will have never been anyone like you, nor will there ever be." You will be the best. You not only will be good, but you will be the best. "Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.' Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings."

Earlier we assumed when Solomon was at Gibeon that he was sacrificing to the Lord, but after this appearance he hurries back to Jerusalem, stands before the ark of the Lord, and offers sacrifices there. On the other hand, look at 2 Chronicles 1:3, which mentions that the tent of meeting, the tabernacle, was located in Gibeon. That is probably what Joshua was referring to when he said you will be woodcutters and water carriers for the house of God. We know that David was the one who brought the ark to Jerusalem. So the ark had parted company with the tabernacle. The tabernacle had not yet been brought.

This suggests that it was not something illicit, necessarily, that Solomon was doing. The narrator simply commented that the reason they were doing this was because the temple had not yet been built. There is no expressed criticism and perhaps not even an implied criticism because it takes time to build things. We will see later how much time it took to build the temple.

In 1 Kings 3 Solomon asks for a discerning heart, and God is pleased. This was a good request, but might there have been a better request? Since the comment keeps being made, "If you will walk in my ways...", perhaps Solomon should have said, "Lord, help me to walk in Your ways; give me a true heart." It is one thing to be competent, clever, discerning, and able; it is another thing to be true to God. The latter is far more important than all of the former. God can do far greater things and bring far greater good and fruitfulness out of one individual—no matter how talented, no matter how smart, no matter how gifted—if he or she is faithful.

When Steve Brown spoke several years ago at a graduation service here he said, "I have a graduation gift for all of you and that is, God willing and by God's grace, 20 years from now you will hear that Steve Brown is still walking with the Lord." I think what he was saying is "My prayer is that God will keep me faithful." We do not dare think that we can do it on our own. Solomon made a good request; God was pleased. But it does not mean that there might not have been a better request.

Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. He had the greatest discernment of any man who ever lived, but that in itself was not enough. He should have asked for a true heart, perhaps. God responds by blessing Solomon and giving him even more than he had requested. He blessed Solomon with riches and with honor. We learn from the story that when God blesses, we also need to beware because blessings themselves can become snares to us. That will be the case in Solomon's life.

As we come to the end of 1 Kings 3 we see Solomon demonstrating that he has been given a God-given wisdom. This enables him to make a ruling in a very difficult judicial case. It is the story of the two women, each of whom had a child. One child died. Apparently the babies were switched at night; or were they? We do not know. Both were claiming the living son, so what was Solomon to do? In typical male fashion, he chose to use the sword. He said bring the sword and we will chop the child in half and you could each have half. The mother's heart says no thanks. We do not know which mother was the real mother, but Solomon knew. God gave him wisdom. He was very discerning, and he was able to ferret out who the true mother was. Verse 28 says, "When all Israel heard the verdict that the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice."

It has been asked if 1 Kings 3:28 ties in with the pattern of accession that we saw earlier in the life of Saul and talked about in the life of David. The pattern is of designation, demonstration, and confirmation by the people as the people recognize whom God had chosen. That may well be the case. This is a time of peace. Solomon is not called upon to demonstrate his valor in some military way, but perhaps demonstrating his wisdom along with the recognition that this is God-given wisdom confirms to the people that God is with this individual. I think it could work into that pattern.

This appearance of God to Solomon and His granting of a good request sets us up for what begins to happen as we move into chapter 4. I have entitled 1 Kings 4-8 "Solomon's Glorious Ministry and Building Projects." I am going to group them all together and only talk about 1 Kings 4 and presume that you have read the rest.

We have come to this central section, this fulcrum of the structure of 1 Kings 1-11. As we begin to read into chapter 4, we first read about Solomon's chief officials, and then we will read about his 12 district governors. Sometimes I think if we knew more about this these lists might be a little more interesting to us than they tend to be. Then we come to something that is a little more gripping to our way of thinking. When we come to 1 Kings 4:20 we begin to read about a time in the life of Israel that sounds wonderful. It was wonderful. After all, Solomon was exceptionally gifted, he was blessed by God, and God is good. So we read in 1 Kings 4:20-25 about a very, very wonderful time.

As you read 1 Kings 4:20-25 I want you to look again for structure. See if you can find some structure in these verses that might have a message for us.

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were

Solomon's subjects all their lives. Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks, and choice fowl. For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the River from Tiphshah to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.

It sounds like a great time. It was a great time, I think. A possible structure of this passage could be ABCBA. Let us put some titles with those letters.

The A elements are in 1 Kings 4:20 and 25. "The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore." They were happy. "During Solomon's lifetime, Judah and Israel [...] lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree." This describes prosperity. In distinction to the next verses, B verses, it is describing domestic prosperity and tranquility. Everyone is happy. Everyone is under his own vine and fig tree. The description of this time in Solomon's reign is that everyone is doing well. It is a great time domestically.

The B elements are in 1 Kings 4:21 and 24. "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines." Verse 24 says, "For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the River." This describes the vastness of Solomon's kingdom. His foreign policy was working. He was in charge. There was domestic prosperity and foreign security. He was in charge and there was no threat; it was a great time.

As we come to the center of this chiasm, in 1 Kings 4:22-23, we read about Solomon's daily provisions. He had a large court. This is a large amount of food, flour, and other things. Thirty cors of a fine flour, 60 cors of meal, 10 heads of stall-fed cattle, (these are daily provisions, by the way), 20 of pasture-fed cattle, and 100 sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, and roebucks, and choice fowl. Either Solomon had a powerfully man-sized appetite or he had a lot of courtiers who were partaking in all this food. As you move into the center of the passage from the domestic prosperity and the foreign security, you find royal luxury. A highly developed centralized governmental structure is beginning to take shape.

Reading this passage straight through, I do not think you would see this as anything particularly sinister. It sounds like a great time. Everyone is happy. Everyone is under his own vine and fig tree, no problem. However, looking more closely and noting what is at the center, some questions are raised. It is possible that things could get out of balance. It is possible that Solomon's wisdom, wealth, and honor given by God could become snares. They could become ends in themselves. Solomon could become self-serving in his use of these blessings. These possibilities are raised as questions if we are looking closely.

Some have asked if some of these lands are ones that should have been dispossessed. Are these places where the people should have been either exterminated or driven away? If so, Solomon should not have been ruling over them. I am not sure, but I do not think that is the case. These may be the lands outside the Land of Promise as circumscribed initially by God's promise, but I am not sure.

Questions have been raised in our minds regarding this very prosperous time when everyone is happy. In 1 Kings 4:26 it says, "Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses. The district officers, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses." It sounds good, does not it? I have read these accounts multiple times and this has never seemed problematic to me. I have, however, asked

myself what the point of this information is. It sounds like it is a tabulation of how many chariot horses and stalls he had. The problem is that verse 26 tells us he is explicitly storing up chariot horses, which is forbidden. Deuteronomy 17 in the Law of the King states specifically that the king is not to go to Egypt to do this. We will discover later, in 1 Kings 10:28, that Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue. He actually got into the arms trade because he would import them and then export them to all the kings of the Hittites and the Amorites.

Let us look quickly at Deuteronomy 17:14, which says, "When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settle in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,' be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses." This sounds familiar. In other words, it is not your choice; it is not for you to demand. The point is that God chooses. Remember in the book of Samuel, God had said to Samuel on the occasion of the elder's demand, "Warn them first, but if they persist, appoint for them a king." Then later he says, "Saul is rejected, I have found for me a king." This is the one whom God chose, the one after His heart. Sometimes translations say, "the one of his own choosing." I think a good translation would be "the one who pleases God, the one who pleases Me." Both actively and passively God is pleased with David. David in his behavior, though not sinless, was pleasing to God because of his faith.

Deuteronomy 17:15 continues, "Be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, 'You are not to go back that way again.' He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." So specific are Solomon's offenses to this particular prohibition that some critical scholars have suggested that the prohibition was written after the fact as a subtle criticism of Solomon. I think God in His wisdom could warn Solomon as well as other kings in advance of what they should not do. I would not follow that particular critical stance, but it is interesting how those three things are mentioned. Horses, the accumulation of wives, and the accumulation of gold come back to haunt us in the story of Solomon.

If you are not familiar with Deuteronomy 17 as you are reading this passage in 1 Kings 4, you read about his stalls and chariots and simply think he was really rich. He was successful. Look at all the things he has. He has his district officers who each in his month supplied provisions for King Solomon. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses. We are reminded of the horses again.

Let us talk about the district officers. The nature of these districts is probably to collect taxes. In fact, it seems to be the case that Solomon redrew the map. Sometimes politicians do that today for advantageous tax purposes. Solomon redrew the map in such a way that he went against certain tribal boundaries. That set the stage for later frictions because people did not like the map being redrawn in unnatural ways, even if it is for the very natural purpose of taxation. These district officers are mentioned and it seems like part of the burgeoning of Solomon's kingdom. But is it a positive thing?

Notice that the narrator does not give us any of this commentary we are talking about here. The narrator just states the facts and moves on. Remember we are dealing with biblical narrative in which there is often subtlety. We are often shown rather than explicitly told. We will eventually be told some things, and things will eventually become explicit. If we were not working through it in this class though, it might be passing us by. These little time-bombs that begin ticking away might be passing us by as they

are implanted in the life of Solomon. They are just there. Would you have made much of them? We read past them, and we go on and everything seems fine, but is it really?

It is possible that these things that we have to look hard to notice would have been more obvious to the original audience as they read these texts. They are quite obvious to some moderns who have Deuteronomy 17 in the forefront of their mind. They read chariots and horses, uh-oh, and district officers for taxation and the accumulation of gold, uh-oh. The more you know about the background, the more obvious these things are even now. However, I think the point is the narrator wants them to be less than very obvious. He wants them to be almost imperceptible. What happened to Solomon in the end is the way it begins, too. It is not as though someone comes with a placard and says, "Do you want to begin to set the stage for a terrific fall later in life?" It is the small choices. We are challenged in the New Testament to be faithful in small things. Conversely, in a negative way, if we are not faithful in small things, then we are running a grave risk of big problems. It is in the little faithfulness that life's path is maintained and made straight.

Look at the next section; this deals with Solomon's wisdom. There are two ways of looking at this as well. In 1 Kings 4:29 it says,

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any man, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

This passage can be read positively. We can read this as Derek Kidner explains it. He says, "Our faith should have an effect in all of life." We should be interested in ecology. We should be interested in the natural world. We should be vitally concerned with all that God has created, the hyssop that grows out of the walls, the cedars of Lebanon. We should excel in every field of human knowledge. Solomon did so. I think Kidner is right. There is a problem with pietism of a certain sort and secular humanism because both of them try to shut God into a narrow sphere. Kidner says God is Lord of all of life. He should be let out of that box. In contrast, pietism says, "I worship God in my little community of worship and I do not want to rub shoulders with the world. I do not want to get out there and be active in the public sphere." Secular humanism says, "As long as you keep God over there, you can have Him, but do not bring Him here where we are." Both try to box God in. Derek Kidner, looking at these verses, says, "Solomon's wisdom caused him to explore all of life," and we should take it positively like that. However, there is also a subtle uneasiness to this. It is that men of all the nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom. He had all these proverbs and songs. He talked about plants and he talked about cedars. You get the impression of the world beating a path to his door because he was so good and clever. The narrative does not say that it was self-serving at this point. It does not say that the blessing that God had given was beginning to become a snare to Solomon. But maybe it was. It does at least raise that question in our minds.

Let us see how you might break this down into a propositional treatment that you could present. One possibility is this: "Since good times can breed bad habits, we must beware when God blesses." The reason I like that is it sounds a little strange to say "beware when God blesses." The reason is because

our blessings could become snares. The first thing would be to say that good times can breed carelessness toward God. In 1 Kings 4:26 Solomon had the chariots and the 12,000 horses. This reminds us of Deuteronomy 17, which says not to accumulate horses, wives, etc. This was a blessing. All this wealth and honor that Solomon was enjoying was a blessing, and yet he was becoming careless already. He took that which he should not have taken. He even took those chariots, which were expressly forbidden.

The second point is that good times can breed callousness toward others. Here we would key in on 1 Kings 4:27-28 where Solomon establishes his district officers and uses them for taxation. He brings more and more into his court when perhaps his people needed it more than he did. Good times can breed that callousness toward other people. If you are not suffering, if you do not know want, if you have no financial difficulties, then maybe you do not have sympathy for anyone else who does. That is an indictment to many of us who do not really have any sympathy for those who have less than we do.

Finally, good times can breed casualness toward our mission. (I was stretching a little bit for another C.) We can become casual toward our mission. I am not saying, though, that I would construe this latter part of 1 Kings 4 negatively. Perhaps Solomon with all his wisdom was beginning to lose sight of the reason he had been given wisdom. Maybe he was forgetting that he had been given it that he might rule God's people in justice and righteousness. Instead he was entertaining other people with the great show he was able to put on. They could not stump him. He could beat Heman, Calcol, and Darda. Nobody could match him; he was the best there was. Maybe he was beginning to lose sight of his mission. To look ahead, when we read in 1 Kings 10 about the visit of the Queen of Sheba, you see this in a heightened form. She came to test him with riddles, but what she saw took her breath away. She was amazed at what Solomon was able to do and at the way his court was seated. She was amazed at Solomon. For all these reasons, we need to beware. I think we especially need to beware when God blesses us. Where we feel adequate is where we are most likely to fall.

Solomon himself, or at least the book of Proverbs for which Solomon is largely responsible, says in Proverbs 27:21, "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, / but man is tested by the praise." We are not sure whether this is objective or subjective genitive. It is either "the praise he offers" or "the praise he receives." It is hard to tell from the language. It could be both. The NIV takes the one option and says, "By the praise he received." It will be woe to us when we begin to believe what some people say about us, positively or negatively.