

# Lesson 23: King Solomon

## Previously...

After the period of the Conquest, the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, but they stopped following God. The book of Judges ended by saying that everyone “did whatever seemed right in their own eyes”. God’s own people, the Israelites, were living in sin, just like the surrounding nations.

They rejected God as their King, asking instead for a human king. God allowed them to have one, but not before the prophet Samuel warned them that human kings would make their lives miserable. But they didn’t listen.

The first king, Saul, was not a good king. His own ambition was more important than obeying God.

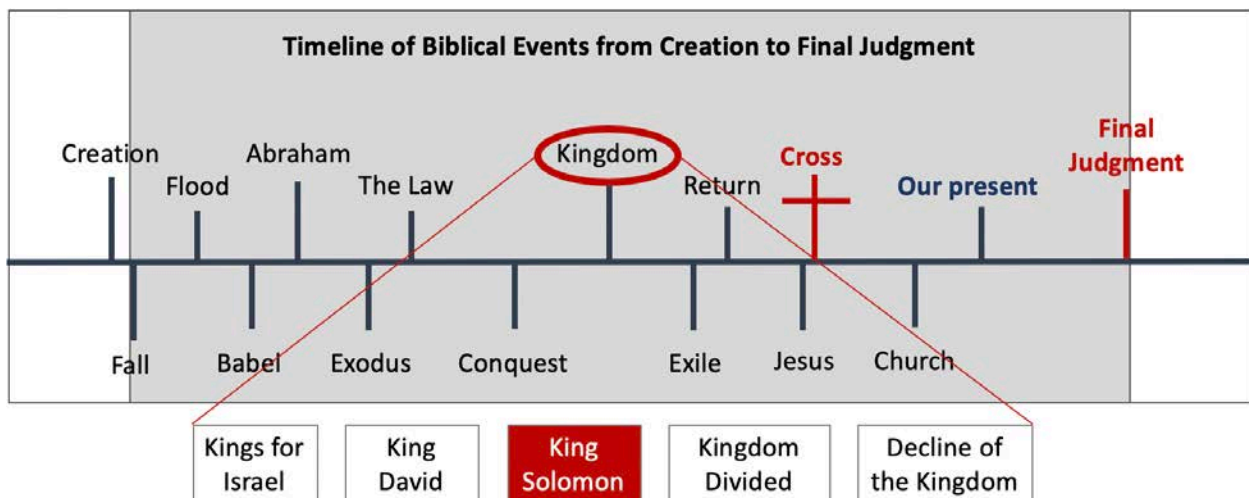
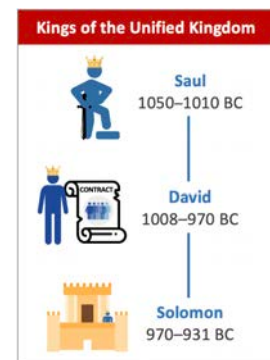
So God rejected him and chose David as the second king. God made an unconditional covenant with David that he would always have descendants on the throne. However, God warned that He would discipline them if they sinned. Discipline’s goal was to turn their hearts back to Him.

Though David sinned greatly by committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah, he confessed and repented when the prophet Nathan spoke to him. David remained faithful to God all his life, through both the good and bad times.

At the end, God gave David a very favourable evaluation, saying that David was a man after His own heart. All future kings would be compared with David, whom God considered the model king.

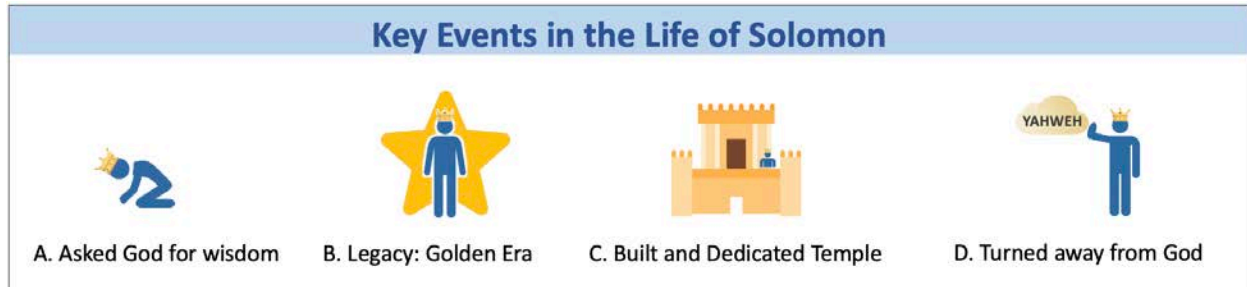
Kingdom of God	
Based on GRACE God would save man	
Election	
	God chose Abraham
	God saved Israel
	God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Law</li> <li>▪ National anthem</li> <li>▪ Temple worship</li> <li>▪ Feasts &amp; festivals</li> </ul>
	Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
	Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unified kingdom</li> </ul>

Grey shows paganism



## The Third and Final King of Israel as a Unified Kingdom: Solomon

1 Kings 1–11 cover the reign of Solomon. In his time, Israel had peace, prosperity, laws, courts, civil government, national holidays and a national temple.



### A. Asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3)

As a young king, Solomon loved Yahweh and worshipped Him. One day, when King Solomon went to worship and sacrifice to God, Yahweh appeared to him.

#### 1 Kings 3:5–13

<sup>5</sup> That night the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!” <sup>6</sup> Solomon replied, “You showed great and faithful love to your servant my father, David, because he was honest and true and faithful to you. And you have continued to show this great and faithful love to him today by giving him a son to sit on his throne.

<sup>7</sup> “Now, O LORD my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn’t know his way around. <sup>8</sup> And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous they cannot be counted! <sup>9</sup> Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?”

<sup>10</sup> The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom.

<sup>11</sup> So God replied, “Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies— <sup>12</sup> I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! <sup>13</sup> And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life!



Solomon asked for wisdom and God answered his prayer by making him the wisest person the world would ever know!

But what is “wisdom”?

As a general definition, wisdom is the ability to judge what is true and right and have good sense.



But biblical wisdom is much more than that. It is more than a set of “success rules” or a “how-to” guide to good living.

Biblical wisdom is deeply related to God as Creator. The Bible tells us that:

- God first designed wisdom and then
- He used it to form the entire creation.

In the passage below, “me” refers to “wisdom”.

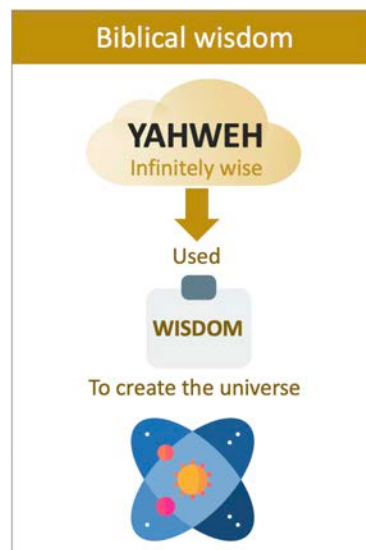
**Proverbs 8:22–23, 27**

<sup>22</sup> “The LORD formed me from the beginning,  
before he created anything else.

<sup>23</sup> I was appointed in ages past,  
at the very first, before the earth began.

<sup>27</sup> I was there when he established the heavens,  
when he drew the horizon on the oceans.

The Bible is saying that every detail of the created world, all the practical, everyday rules of wisdom come from God’s wisdom. Wisdom is in fact, the expression of God’s creativity.



Interestingly, in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified or represented by Lady Wisdom. Foolishness is also represented by another woman, Lady Folly.



Lady Wisdom	Lady Folly
<p><b>Proverbs 8:1–8</b></p> <p><sup>1</sup> <u>Listen as Wisdom calls out!</u> Hear as understanding raises her voice!</p> <p><sup>2</sup> On the hilltop along the road, she takes her stand at the crossroads.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> By the gates at the entrance to the town, on the road leading in, she cries aloud,</p> <p><sup>4</sup> “I call to you, to all of you! I raise my voice to all people.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> You simple people, <u>use good judgment.</u> You foolish people, show some understanding.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> Listen to me! For I have important things to tell you. <u>Everything I say is right,</u></p> <p><sup>7</sup> for I speak the truth and detest every kind of deception.</p> <p><sup>8</sup> <u>My advice is wholesome.</u> There is nothing devious or crooked in it.</p>	<p><b>Proverbs 9:13–18</b></p> <p><sup>13</sup> The woman named <u>Folly is brash.</u> She is <u>ignorant</u> and doesn’t know it.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> She sits in her doorway on the heights overlooking the city.</p> <p><sup>15</sup> She calls out to men going by who are minding their own business.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> “Come in with me,” <u>she urges the simple.</u> <u>To those who lack good judgment,</u> she says,</p> <p><sup>17</sup> “Stolen water is refreshing; food eaten in secret tastes the best!”</p> <p><sup>18</sup> But little do they know that the dead are there. <u>Her guests are in the depths of the grave.</u></p>

Why would God talk about both Wisdom and Folly as women?

In Genesis, God created **woman to complete man.**

- Adam was given the job of responsible dominion and filling the earth. But Adam could not do that without a helper created just for him.
- And this helper was the woman, Eve.

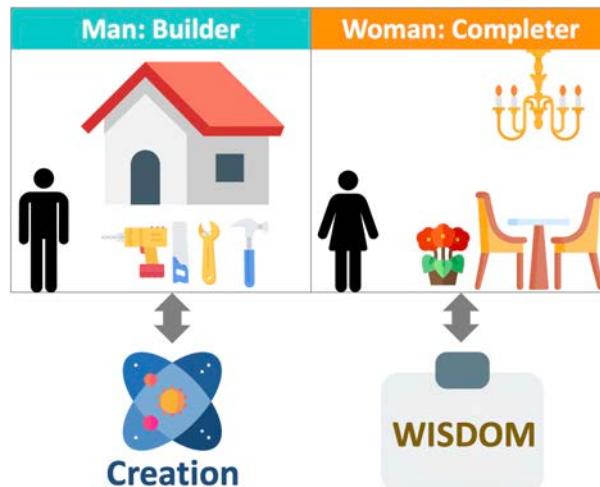
Eve completed Adam.



In the same way that woman completes man, so **wisdom completes creation**.



A simple example is this: a man builds a house, but it is not complete until a woman decorates and beautifies it to make it a comfortable home. So wisdom is represented by a woman, the “completer”. Responsible dominion is not possible without wisdom.



On the other hand, foolishness is also represented by a woman. Because, instead of being wise and beautifying the home, the woman could also end up messing it up, “completing” it badly and creating a home unfit for living.

The Bible says that God created the universe with wisdom.

- God created the universe and
- The way He “decorated” it and beautified it was with wisdom, which is an expression of His creativity.

Therefore, the source of wisdom is God Himself.

Because mankind was made in the image of God, people also have aspects of His wisdom. And it is when we fear or love Yahweh that we will become wise.

**Proverbs 9:10**

Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom.

Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.

When Solomon asked for wisdom, God granted his request. God made him wiser than anyone who had ever lived or who will ever live. Fittingly, it was Solomon who wrote much of the “wisdom literature” in the Bible. In fact, “wisdom” itself is so important that the Bible dedicates many books to it. For example:

- **Proverbs:** discusses what wisdom is and provides wisdom on man’s attitudes towards work and social life.
- **Job:** teaches about wisdom in the midst of suffering.
- **Psalms and Chronicles:** gives wisdom on musical expressions of praise and laments to God.
- **Ecclesiastes:** provides wisdom on philosophical reflection on life.
- **Song of Solomon:** gives wisdom on marital love and sex.
- **Daniel:** deals with political wisdom. As a minister and advisor to pagan kings, Daniel shares wisdom with the Gentiles. Daniel also teaches us wisdom on how to live as believers under pagan governments. (In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Daniel is in the “writings” and not “prophets” section. This is because the main objective is to give wisdom to struggling believers.)

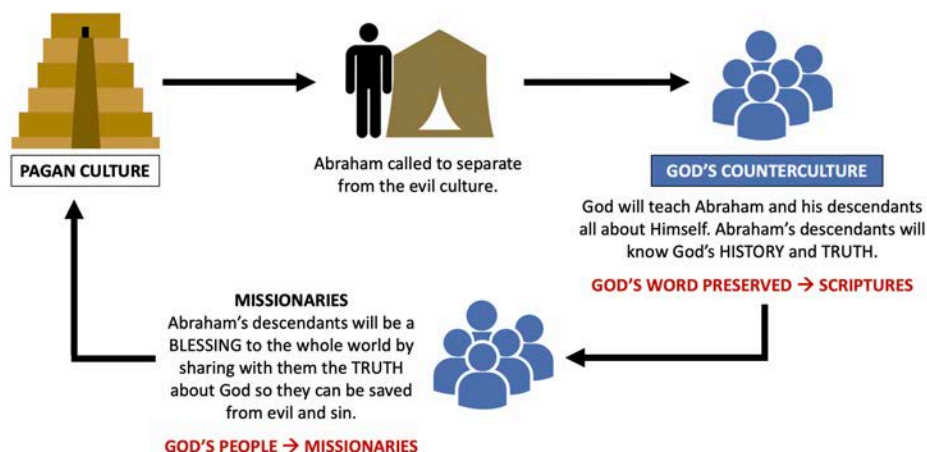


Through his powerful gift of wisdom, Solomon had a huge influence on Israel’s culture.



**B. Solomon’s Legacy: The Golden Era (1 Kings 4, 10)**

God’s plan with Israel from the start is that they would be a counterculture against the pagan culture of the world.

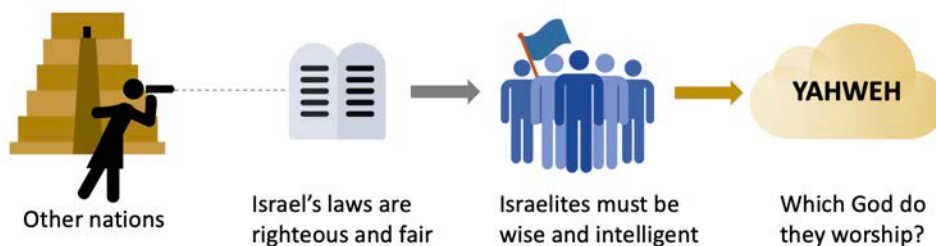




By giving the Israelites good and wise laws on Mount Sinai, He wanted to draw the other nations to look towards Him. This is what Moses said to the people when he gave them God's laws.

### Deuteronomy 4:5–8

<sup>5</sup> “Look, I now teach you these decrees and regulations just as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy. <sup>6</sup> Obey them completely, and you will display your wisdom and intelligence among the surrounding nations. When they hear all these decrees, they will exclaim, ‘How wise and prudent are the people of this great nation!’ <sup>7</sup> For what great nation has a god as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we call on him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation has decrees and regulations as righteous and fair as this body of instructions that I am giving you today?



Counterculture, by its very nature, is against the culture of evil mankind and the culture that Satan wants to build. There will always be a tension between them.

God planned for Israel to be this counterculture. Then the Israelites would be a blessing as people came to believe in Yahweh, just as Gentiles like Rahab and Ruth did.



Because of his God-given wisdom, King Solomon's reign was considered the golden era in Israel's history. There was never another time when the Israelites were more successful, prosperous or admired. King Solomon had the best opportunity to build a God-focused culture in Israel.

How did wisdom look like during Solomon's life? He was knowledgeable in many different areas of life. In fact, he was a genius! He was not a “specialist” who had focused knowledge only on one area such as plants or architecture. Because Solomon's wisdom was from God and God is Lord of all creation, Solomon was knowledgeable on all aspects of God's work: he was an excellent musician, he built two navies, he was a botanist, a zoologist and more. He was also wiser than all the important men in history. Other nations would come to respectfully learn from him!

### 1 Kings 4:29–34

<sup>29</sup> God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore. <sup>30</sup> In fact, his wisdom exceeded that of all the wise men of the East and the wise men of Egypt. <sup>31</sup> He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite and the sons of Mahol—Heman, Calcol, and Darda. His fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. <sup>32</sup> He composed some 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs. <sup>33</sup> He could speak with authority about all kinds of plants, from the great cedar of Lebanon

to the tiny hyssop that grows from cracks in a wall. He could also speak about animals, birds, small creatures, and fish. <sup>34</sup> And kings from every nation sent their ambassadors to listen to the wisdom of Solomon.



Solomon is a good example of how biblical wisdom gives understanding on the unity of all of the details of life. Biblical wisdom does not separate what is “spiritual” from what is “non-religious”. Yahweh is Lord of all and not just what we sometimes think of as “spiritual”.

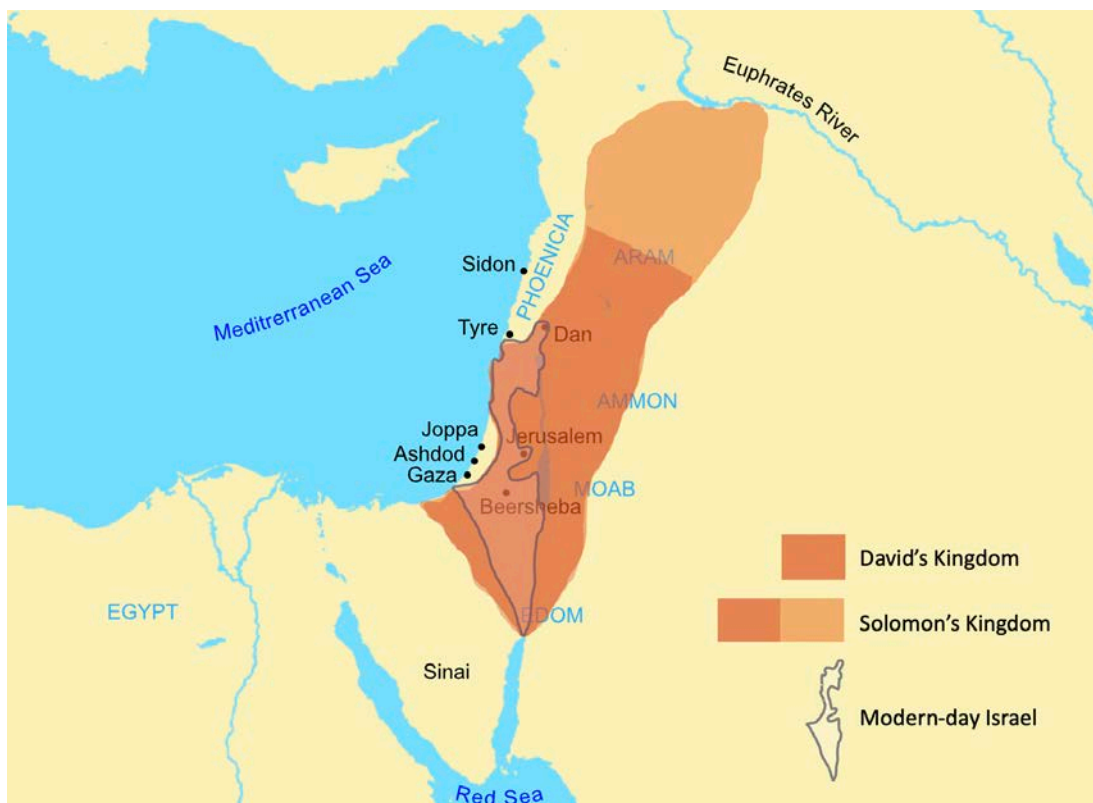
Because Solomon led the nation with wisdom, the Israelites thrived. Israel under King Solomon was a good picture of what a nation under God’s blessing looks like. For example, in the Bible, population growth was always a sign of God’s great blessing on His people. And in Solomon’s time, the population grew greatly.

### 1 Kings 4:20

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They were very contented, with plenty to eat and drink.

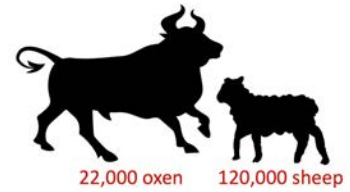


Israel’s territory was also historically the largest it had ever been. Solomon ruled over what is today southern Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, parts of Jordan and parts of Egypt.





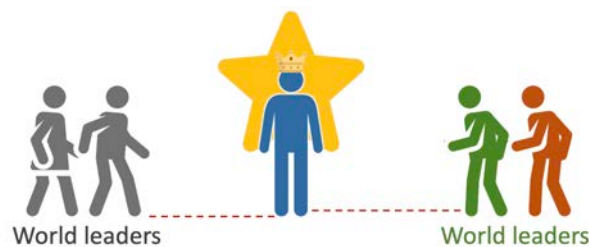
God also made the nation of Israel very rich. For example, when they were worshipping Yahweh, they could afford to sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep at the same time (1 Kings 8:62–63)! The amount of sacrifice shows the amount of total wealth they actually had!



The Bible also talks about Solomon's great architectural developments, his great successes in commerce and businesses and how incredibly large his tax revenues and treasury were (1 Kings 10:14–29).



Solomon's reputation for wisdom was so great that leaders from around the world came to learn from him. When the Queen of Sheba came to seek wisdom from him, she was awed and amazed by just how wise and rich he was (1 Kings 10:1–10).



In this way, much biblical wisdom was “shared” with the world during Solomon's time.

Importantly, during his reign, there was a God-friendly culture. “Culture” is:

- the social behaviour,
- habits,
- skills,
- arts,
- instruments and
- institutions

of a group of people during a given time period.

In Solomon's time, believers in Yahweh had great influence on culture. It was a really admirable civilisation.

They had all the normal things one would expect in a culture: music, poetry, literature, architecture, art and more.



Music



Poetry



Art



Architecture



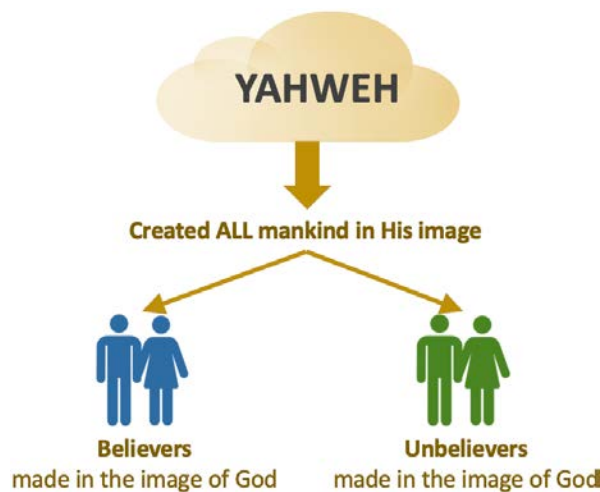
Literature

But importantly, it was a powerfully righteous culture with foundations based on God’s Word and the Mosaic law code that God had given. The Temple, representing God’s presence and worship of Him, was central to that culture.



### Do unbelievers have any “wisdom” that comes from God?

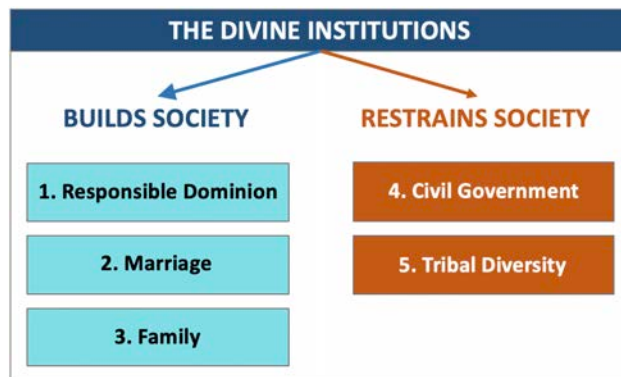
Yahweh is the source of all true wisdom. Mankind was made in the image of this all-wise God. Even though man is fallen, sinful man has not lost all the wisdom that God shared with man. All people, both Israelites and Gentiles, share some wisdom of God because all mankind was created in the image of God. This includes unbelievers.



### Divine Institutions

For example, many unbelievers continue to follow the wisdom principles that God had established, such as the divine institutions of responsible dominion, marriage, family, civil government and tribal diversity.

They might not believe in Yahweh or know that it was Yahweh who established these institutions, but nevertheless, something in them tells them these are good and right social institutions to live by.



## National laws

Another example is in the establishing of a nation's laws.



All good laws and their principles originate from God and can be found in His Mosaic Law. For whatever reason a pagan nation decides to establish or follow laws that mirror the Mosaic Law, they will be acting wisely and will benefit from the wisdom of their choices.






Nations who reject the principles and applications of the Mosaic Law and do the exact opposite will not have laws that are wise and will live with the consequences of their man-made laws.

Hence, wisdom can indeed be found in unbelievers even if they do not recognise Yahweh as Creator-God of the universe or put their faith in Him.

Even Solomon understood that wisdom can be found in unbelievers. In building up Israel, Solomon used some wisdom that came from the surrounding pagan nations.

For example:

- Solomon called on craftsmen from Tyre to construct the temple (1 Kings 5);
- his merchant navy was managed by Gentile seamen (1 Kings 9:26–28);
- and the Sidonians provided the cedar logs for the temple, because Solomon said no one could cut timbers like the Sidonians (1 Kings 5:6).

Solomon's Temple	Solomon's Navy	Solomon's cedar logs
		
Craftsmen from Tyre	Gentile seamen	Sidonians

Solomon could work with non-believers without compromising on his loyalty to God. This was because he believed God was Creator of all and unbelievers had to also conform to the wisdom pattern of the world that God created.

If unbelievers are successful in something, perhaps they have discovered something about God's world that others have not. Believers must not be quick to dismiss such wisdom but study it to see if they can learn from it without compromising their loyalty to God.



## C. Solomon Built and Dedicated the Temple (1 Kings 5–8)

When King David had wanted to build a temple for Yahweh, God told him, through the prophet Nathan, that it would not be his job. Instead, it would be David's son who would build the temple. This is what God said to David.

### 2 Samuel 7:12–13a

<sup>12</sup> For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. <sup>13</sup> He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name.

Building the temple of God in Jerusalem was the grand act of Solomon's life. He fulfilled the dream that his father David had and what God had promised.

With his great wealth and wisdom, Solomon gathered all the best materials and engaged the most skilled craftsmen for the job. The whole project took seven years to complete. After it was built, Solomon dedicated the temple with prayer.

When Solomon finished dedicating the temple, God appeared to him again and reminded the king to be faithful to Him.

**1 Kings 9:3–9**

<sup>3</sup> The LORD said to him, “I have heard your prayer and your petition. I have set this Temple apart to be holy—this place you have built where my name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to my heart.

<sup>4</sup> “As for you, if you will follow me with integrity and godliness, as David your father did, obeying all my commands, decrees, and regulations, <sup>5</sup> then I will establish the throne of your dynasty over Israel forever. For I made this promise to your father, David: ‘One of your descendants will always sit on the throne of Israel.’

<sup>6</sup> “But if you or your descendants abandon me and disobey the commands and decrees I have given you, and if you serve and worship other gods, <sup>7</sup> then I will uproot Israel from this land that I have given them. I will reject this Temple that I have made holy to honor my name. I will make Israel an object of mockery and ridicule among the nations. <sup>8</sup> And though this Temple is impressive now, all who pass by will be appalled and will gasp in horror. They will ask, ‘Why did the LORD do such terrible things to this land and to this Temple?’ <sup>9</sup> “And the answer will be, ‘Because his people abandoned the LORD their God, who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and they worshiped other gods instead and bowed down to them. That is why the LORD has brought all these disasters on them.’”

God had earlier made an unconditional promise to David that his dynasty would survive, that one of his descendants would always be on the throne.

But to Solomon, similar to Saul, God made a conditional promise.

- IF Solomon followed Yahweh, THEN God would establish Solomon’s dynasty forever.
- But IF Solomon turned away from God, THEN God would scatter Israel in discipline.






CONDITIONAL DYNASTY	
<p><b>IF</b> Solomon obeys</p> <p><b>THEN</b> Solomon’s dynasty will be established forever</p>	<p><b>IF</b> Solomon rebels</p> <p><b>THEN</b> Israel will be scattered in discipline</p>

**D. Solomon Turned Away From God (1 Kings 11)**

Despite God’s warnings, King Solomon, the wisest man of all the earth, turned away from Yahweh. In fact, he introduced spiritual rot into the heart of Israel! How could that happen?

The Bible tells us that Solomon didn’t obey the instructions that God gave to all kings through Moses.

God's Instructions for Israel's kings	What King Solomon Did
<p><b>Deuteronomy 17:16</b>            "The king <u>must not build up a large stable</u> of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the LORD has told you, 'You must <u>never return to Egypt.</u>'"</p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;">Built-up 1,400 chariots</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;">Gathered 12,000 horsemen</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;">Imported horses from Egypt</div> </div> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;"><b>1 Kings 10:26-29</b></div> </div>

Why didn't God want the king to have many horses? Basically, God didn't want them to have a standing army. Horses were a source of military power and political reputation. Israel was to depend on God Himself to lead and defend them, not on their own military might.



God especially did not want Israel to have a relationship with Egypt again. Egypt was a sign of the evil pagan world which God insisted that Israel be separated from. But Solomon disobeyed.

He also disobeyed God's instructions on wealth.

God's Instructions for Israel's kings	What King Solomon Did
<p><b>Deuteronomy 17:17b</b>            And he <u>must not accumulate large amounts of wealth</u> in silver and gold for himself.</p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;">Taxed the people very heavily</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;">Hoarded so much silver that silver was as common as stone in Jerusalem</div> </div> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;"><b>1 Kings 10:27, 12:4</b></div> </div>

God warned Israel's kings not to accumulate silver and gold for themselves and be tempted to rely on their own wealth rather than on Him. But Solomon rebelled.

Most importantly, Yahweh also gave instructions about wives.

God's Instructions for Israel's kings	What King Solomon Did
<p><b>Deuteronomy 17:17a</b>            The king <u>must not take many wives</u> for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD.</p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;">Had 700 wives</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;">And 300 concubines</div> </div> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;"><b>1 Kings 11:3</b></div> </div>



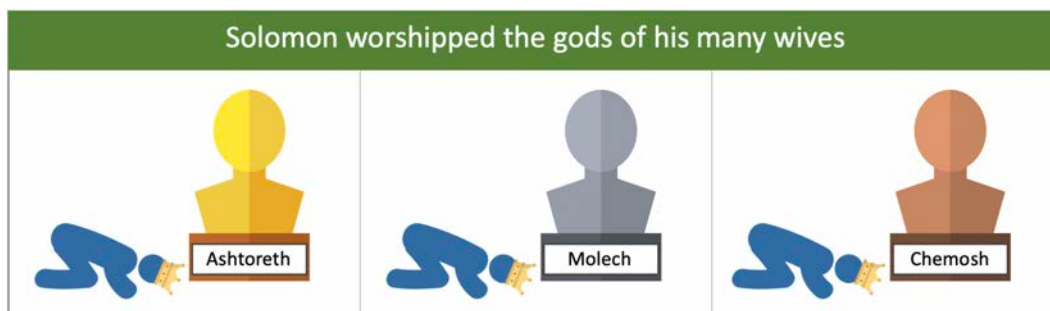
Many of the women in Solomon's life were Gentiles who worshipped idols.

### 1 Kings 11:1, 3–8

<sup>1</sup> Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites.

<sup>3</sup> He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the LORD his God, as his father, David, had been. <sup>5</sup> Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> In this way, Solomon did what was evil in the LORD's sight; he refused to follow the LORD completely, as his father, David, had done. <sup>7</sup> On the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, he even built a pagan shrine for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and another for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. <sup>8</sup> Solomon built such shrines for all his foreign wives to use for burning incense and sacrificing to their gods.



Many of his wives were from people groups that God forbade Israelites from marrying (Exodus 23:26–33; 34:12–16)! He even married Pharaoh's daughter when God clearly told Israel not to have anything to do with Egypt again.

Why did Solomon do that? Why have so many wives?

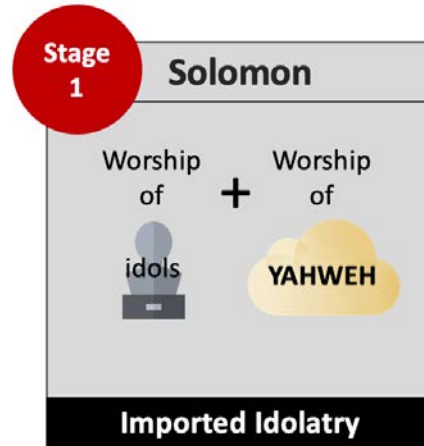
It was typical of rulers at that time to marry for political reasons. The thinking was that a ruler could secure peace with neighbouring nations because of political alliances formed through marriages. They believed that foreign kings would not invade their nation if their daughter were the wife of that nation's king. Solomon appears to have shared that belief. Instead of relying on God to secure peace, Solomon took matters into his own hands. He probably thought he was being smart by following the political strategies of the nations around Israel.



However, unlike Ruth and Rahab, two Gentiles who believed in the true God and then married Israelites, the Bible doesn't record any of Solomon's wives believing in Yahweh. Instead, they worshipped their own idols.

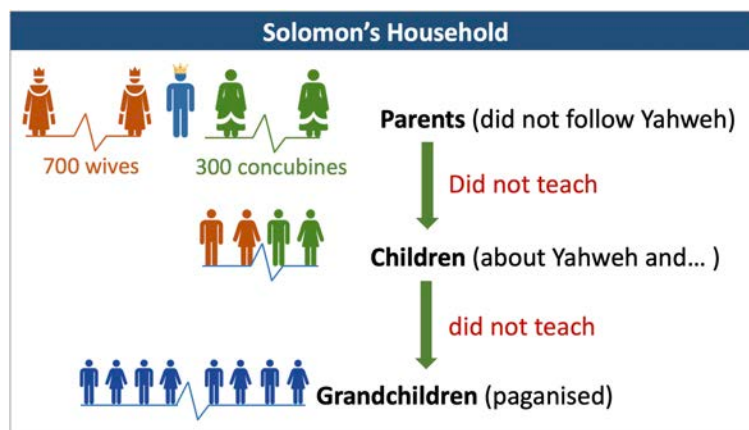
Through his unbelieving wives, King Solomon imported idol worship and idolatry into Israel! In fact, he financed these false religions by building temples for them!

### How Israel became Paganised



What's worse is that these pagan wives brought unbelieving values into Solomon's own home. If Solomon had believing wives, His children would have learned God's values and His laws. And these same Bible-based values would have spread throughout society, influencing and impacting the culture of the people as a whole.

God had called Israel to be a counterculture, to be different from all the nations around it and it could have been! But instead, Solomon's unbelieving wives brought in unbelief, leading to mixed values in their children and pagan values seeping into society.



Through his own example, Solomon encouraged Israelites to combine belief in the true God with the worship of idols!

The golden era of Solomon could have gone so well, building a strong foundation of people who believed in God. Israel could have continued to receive Yahweh's blessing but instead, Solomon led the nation into rejection of God!

## Are there really no problems with a believer marrying an unbeliever?

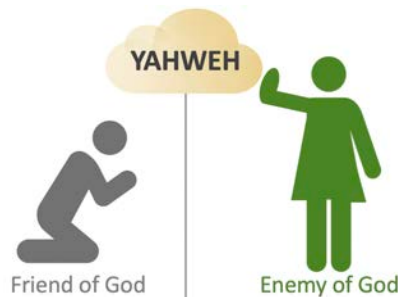
King Solomon believed that inter-marriages were stronger than international treaties in securing political alliances. In a sense, he was right. This is because the power of a marital union or marital covenant is greater than a mere treaty between nations.

In any marriage, there needs to be unity of purpose:

- Why are they getting married?
- What is their shared vision of life?
- What are their common beliefs?
- What are their shared principles?

In a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, this is how they think:

- **Believer:** I will bow my knee to Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe.
- **Unbeliever:** I absolutely refuse to bow to Yahweh. He is of no consequence to me.



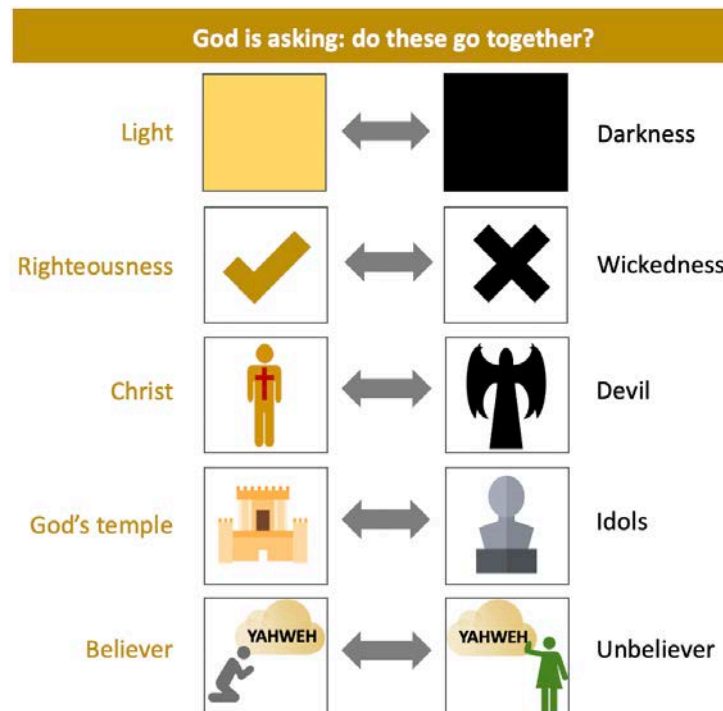
One person is a friend of God and the other person is a self-declared enemy of God. They have opposite or contradictory principles. They clash. There can be no unity of purpose and direction.

### 2 Corinthians 6:14–16

<sup>14</sup> Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever?

<sup>16</sup> And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

"I will live in them  
and walk among them.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.



Solomon tried this kind of marriage. He failed. He compromised on his values and beliefs. He gave up on his absolute principles. He gave in to his wives. He followed their vision and beliefs.

If the wisest human could not continue to worship God while being married to an unbelieving partner, we should take this warning seriously. We too, will not be able to stay wholly true and devoted to God while being bound in marital covenant with rejectors of God.

But what if a believer is already married to an unbeliever? Should they attempt to separate? No. The apostle Paul shared his understanding of how Jesus' teaching would apply in this specific situation.

### **1 Corinthians 7:12–16**

<sup>12</sup> Now, I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a fellow believer has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. <sup>13</sup> And if a believing woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him.

<sup>14</sup> For the believing wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the believing husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy. <sup>15</sup> (But if the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace.) <sup>16</sup> Don't you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don't you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you?

Paul says they are to remain in the situation they are in as far as it is possible.

The believing spouse “brings holiness” to the marriage because in living for God, the power of the Holy Spirit will help them bring positive spiritual and moral influences into the family. There will be some continued struggles and challenges in the marriage, but as the believing spouse continues to pray, seek God’s help and strive to be a good testimony, as Paul says, the unbelieving spouse may even be led to become a believer.

## What happened after Solomon turned away from God

To discipline Solomon, God raised up enemies against Israel.

- Hadad, an Edomite, threatened Israel from Edom (1 Kings 11:14–22).
- Rezon who ruled Syria (Aram) fought with Solomon from the north (1 Kings 11:23–25).
- Ironically, Egypt, the nation that Solomon foolishly made an alliance with not only harboured Israel’s enemies, they eventually invaded from the south (1 Kings 14:25–28)!



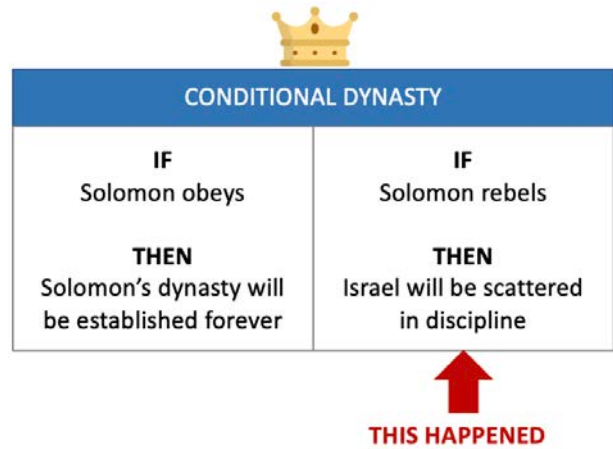
That was not all. As God had already warned Solomon, He tore the kingdom away from him.

### 1 Kings 11:9–13

<sup>9</sup> The LORD was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. <sup>10</sup> He had warned Solomon specifically about worshipping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the LORD’s command.

11 So now the LORD said to him, “Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my decrees, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants.

12 But for the sake of your father, David, I will not do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son. 13 And even so, I will not take away the entire kingdom; I will let him be king of one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, my chosen city.”



God gave the kingdom to Jeroboam, who was one of Solomon’s servants (1 Kings 11:26).

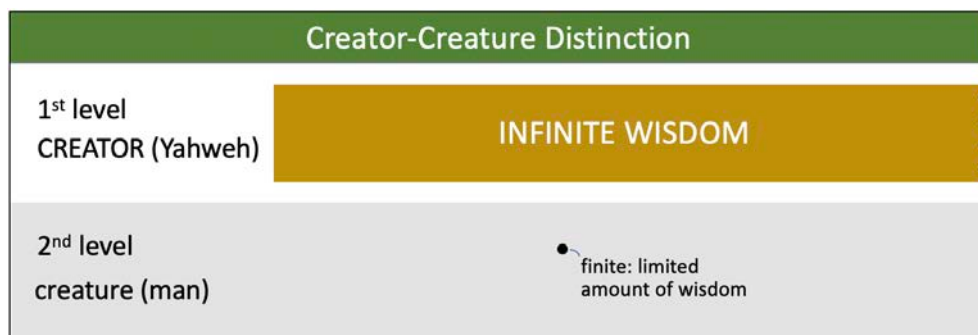
But instead of repenting of his sins and accepting God’s punishment humbly, Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam instead (1 Kings 11:40). Solomon rebelliously rejected God’s judgment on him. After reigning 40 years, Solomon died.

## Sanctification Lessons from the Life of Solomon

### 1. God-given wisdom must be used with God’s continued counsel.

Many people wonder how the wisest man on earth could be so foolish as to marry foreign wives and then get swayed into rebellion against God. What happened?

Wisdom comes from God Himself. Wisdom can never be fully understood by man, no matter how wise man is. God has an infinite amount of wisdom, but mankind, even Solomon, only has a limited amount.



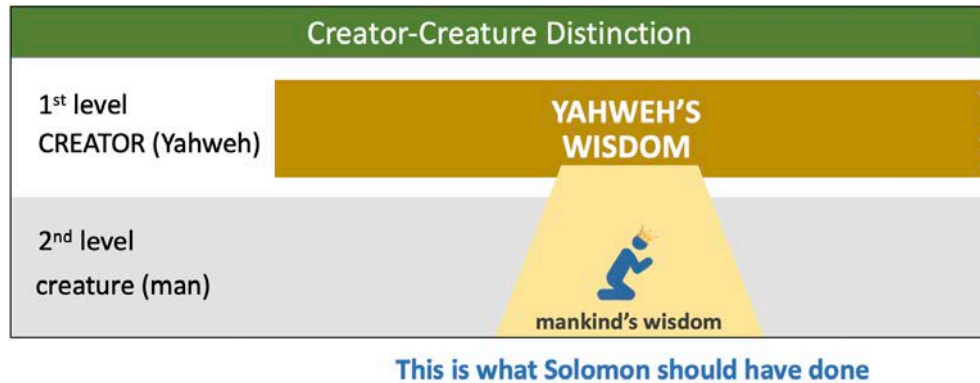
This means that people will never be able to understand all things. Solomon himself came to realise this when he wrote in Ecclesiastes that man can never know the scope of what Yahweh knows and does.



**Ecclesiastes 3:11**

Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

Even though Solomon had God-given wisdom, he should have used it carefully, all the while consulting with God and seeking guidance from Him. He should have submitted his wisdom under the wisdom and authority of Yahweh.



God's gifts are not meant to be used independently of Him.

If Solomon had prioritised his personal relationship with Yahweh and obeyed all of God's instructions for kings, he might have realised the foolishness of some of the things he was thinking to do and not do them.

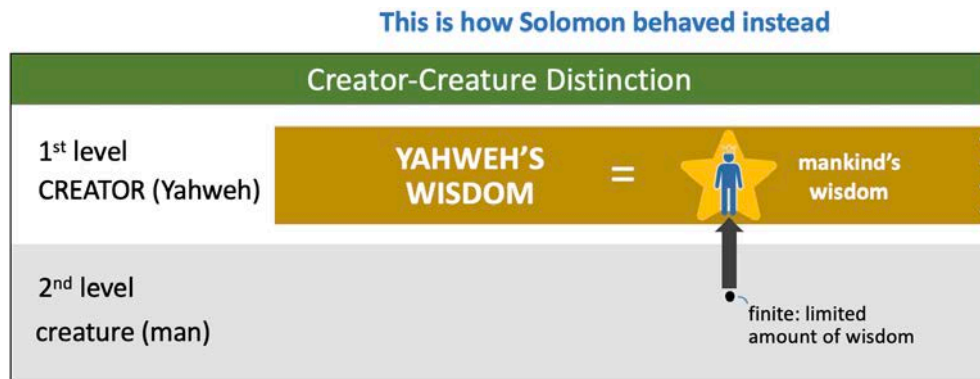
**Deuteronomy 17:18–20**

<sup>18</sup> "When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the LORD his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. <sup>20</sup> This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel.



Instead, Solomon believed that he had such great human wisdom that he did not need God.

He mistakenly tried to use his God-given skill without Yahweh.



The lesson and warning from Solomon's life is that no matter how smart, wise or gifted we are, we must never attempt to use our God-given skills and talents without submitting them to Yahweh.

We need to constantly ask God how our gifts and talents can be used to glorify and honour Him and how He wants us to use them to be a blessing to others.

## 2. To live a good life, the most important thing is to fear God.

Towards the end of Solomon's life, God used him to write the book of Ecclesiastes. In this book, he lists down everything that he had tried in his life to find fulfilment apart from God Himself, but had found no meaning in any of his pursuits.

### Ecclesiastes 2:8–11

<sup>8</sup> I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire! <sup>9</sup> So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. <sup>10</sup> Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors.

<sup>11</sup> But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.



Finally, at the conclusion of the book, Solomon gives his final wise counsel.

### **Ecclesiastes 12:13–14**

<sup>13</sup> That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty. <sup>14</sup> God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.



Solomon had everything this world could offer, but they were empty and meaningless in the end. Nothing was fulfilling without God. Solomon started off well, but ended very badly.

We need to seek God's grace to help us focus on Him and not on everything else.

- Does wealth or status charm us?
- Are we overly focused on leisure and entertainment?
- Do we spend our time seeking and focusing on accumulating things?

The wisest man on earth found that he had made poor choices by focusing on them instead of God.

Solomon rightly ended by saying, "God will judge us for everything we do." Let us pray that God will guide us to live purposeful lives focused on Him, so that we will get a good evaluation from Him at the end of it.

## Should Christians avoid being involved in “cultural” or “unchristian” things like secular art, music, dance, etc.?

Many believers down through history have struggled with their relationship between personal faith and public culture. For example:

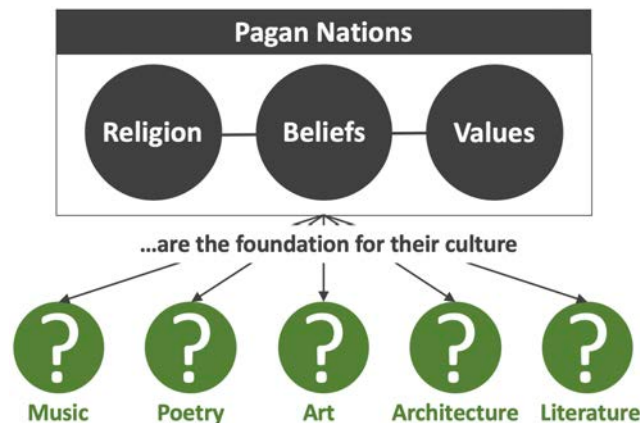
- How much should a believer be involved in the culture of the world?
- What should a believer do with the talents and gifts that God has given when it comes to expressing them within the culture they live in?

Culture is not neutral. It has a source.

For Israel, the source or foundation is the Word of God. The Word of God and biblical wisdom define the culture of Israel.



In pagan nations, their religion, beliefs and values define their culture.



There are three general responses that believers have about the prevailing culture of their nation:

1. **Follow:** They will submit to the cultural expectations and norms of where they live and make sure they fit in.



2. **Force-fit:** Whenever they face tension between the prevailing culture and the Bible, they attempt to reinterpret the Bible to ease the tension or the clash. This helps them be “obedient” to the Bible while embracing the culture they live in.



3. **Separate:** they will separate from all present culture because they believe that something is wrong with it. A good example of this are the Amish, a people group who live by the culture of a previous era and reject the current culture. Another example are monks in monasteries. A less extreme example is when people withdraw from the culture because they believe that is the best way to remain holy in a sinful world. They don't engage or participate in any form of general community life. Their involvement is largely limited to Christian activities.



Israel was called to be a counterculture among the nations.

- They were not supposed to follow the culture of the pagan nations.
- They were not supposed to force-fit or reinterpret God's laws and mesh them with the pagan culture.
- But neither were they supposed to kill culture by hiding their God-given abilities and skills to farm, ranch, build, create music, produce art, dance, garden, cook, decorate, craft, engage in sports, perform on stage, sing, etc.

They were called to be a "counterculture", they were not called to "no culture".

Learning from Solomon and Israel's golden era, we see that when believers know the Word of God well and are loyal to Him, a strong biblical culture can form. Believers can participate in the life and culture of the community and be influential in society. We should not think that being loyal to God means suppressing our God-given talents for cultural expression.

We should not feel like our "spiritual" and "intellectual" sides must remain separate. For example, after God created all animals, He told Adam to name them. God was asking Adam to exercise his creativity in naming the animals.

**Genesis 2:19**

So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one.



This was not a "spiritual task". Adam didn't need to seek God's guidance as each animal came by. He didn't need to turn to God with each new animal and ask, "What is your will for the name of this animal?"

Adam was free to exercise his intellect and creativity. In fact, God told him to exercise authority in this intellectual matter. Yahweh as Creator-God of all, is God of both spiritual and intellectual areas of life.

Within God-given parameters, believers have the freedom and joy to express, create and exercise God-given talents in many diverse areas of life.

Solomon wasn't a specialist who limited his interest only to "Christian" things. His God-given expression of wisdom covered an incredible spectrum of life. Biblical culture is expressed in creative energy and production of new things. In fact, that is how God wants us to worship Him. This is what God said:

**Deuteronomy 6:5**

And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.



This is what is captured in the original Hebrew meaning:

- **Heart:** Your inner person including your mind and will.
- **Soul:** Your life in all its parts including what you eat, your work, your hobbies, your choices, your passion and all your activities.



With this understanding, we should have the freedom to love and worship God by participating, creating and influencing culture.

With regards to using and enjoying the cultural work of unbelievers, we should have the freedom to do so, but with God-guided controls and filters. We should ask God for discernment to know if it is wise or unwise for us to participate in, use, or enjoy something. We don't need to honour their unbelief but we can examine what they have discovered or created, filter it through Scripture and learn. We should avoid the extremes.



However, we must not ignore the fact that biblical culture and pagan culture will always clash.

When Israel was loyal to God and biblical culture grew, it disrupted pagan civilisation because Israel lived by a different standard. This may make pagans angry and they often feel threatened because it is something they can't control. This often leads to tension. (On the other hand, biblical culture can attract pagans tired of their evil culture.)

As believers, we need to pray for frontline Christians such as believing school teachers in a public school system, or Christian attorneys battling judicial systems, or believing healthcare workers who have to operate within pagan laws, etc.

They willingly and bravely face the cultural tension every day. This isn't easy. It would be easier for them to remove themselves, to choose to "separate". But they stand up for biblical culture in the face of pagan culture.

Many of them know they are going to be targeted for ridicule; they will be criticised and opposed. However, many of them also know that they are on the winning side. They know how history will play out and how God overcomes evil in the end. So they choose not to be intimidated by the ones who will eventually lose the cultural battle.

- Let's pray for other believers as they face the tension each and every day.
- Let's pray for ourselves and how God wants us to participate in culture.
- Most of all, know that we don't have to face such challenges and questions alone. Gather as a church or with other believers to look into Scripture, pray and trust that God will guide us to the best God-honouring choices and actions in each difficult situation.



## **How is it possible to remain loyal to God when we are mixing with people whose hearts and minds are in line with non-biblical culture?**

Many of us try to get along with unbelievers by agreeing with them on as many topics as possible. Shared opinions, ideas and feelings help to give a sense of agreement and friendship. We might label these types of relationships as “good friendships”. But are they? If we avoid hard conversations about important topics where we disagree, can we truly say we have engaged them in the way that God wants us to? For example, are we able to engage in discussions like who is our ultimate authority in life, or the fallen state of mankind, or what we believe about life and death and eternal destiny?

In reality, what we often have with unbelieving friends is only a superficial veneer or semblance of a relationship. It’s non-confrontational, light and easy, but there is no real depth. We don’t have deep understanding of each other’s values and worldviews and we can’t admit to having respect for each other despite our deep differences.

But the danger is in our attempt to “get along” with them. We often end up deliberately or unthinkingly going along with unbelievers on many “truth” areas. We make it seem that we believe that all opinions, beliefs, choices and paths are valid. While we may rationalise that this keeps the friendship “peaceful”, this approach is totally dishonouring to God.

How then should we think about personal relationships with unbelievers? Here are three thoughts.

1. **We must choose to be loyal to our personal relationship with God above all else.** We must be very aware of what God has told us in His Word which we can’t compromise without disrespecting Him.
2. **We should recognise that most of our relationships with unbelievers will be at a limited depth.** There will be many who won’t be willing to engage genuinely with us on important but difficult topics. They are content with a superficial relationship. When interacting with these friends, don’t compromise on our loyalty to God by simply agreeing with them just so they feel we are “getting along”. It’s very unlikely that King Solomon had personal time with all 1,000 women in his life to engage in genuine conversation and understanding of their differences and beliefs. It’s more likely that in trying to maintain a level of peace and unity, he simply gave in to them in order to “get along”. The Bible tells us the disastrous results of his giving in.
3. **We need to intentionally engage and invest time in the unbelievers who are willing to have a deeper relationship with us.** With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, we should discuss our spiritual beliefs and differences, and wrestle with hard topics and truths. We need to do this in a winsome, loving and clear manner.

Our motivation to do the hard thing is love—love for God and love for those who do not yet know God. Do we love our unbelieving friends enough to risk losing our friendship because we care enough to share the gospel truth? Are we willing to spend the time to have uncomfortable and difficult conversations because we believe it really matters? King Solomon did not. What about us?

## Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. How do we ensure that we use our God-given wisdom and talents in ways that glorify God?
2. If all the world's wisdom is derived from God's wisdom, how should we treat knowledge, advice, scientific discoveries, business wisdom and other learnings from unbelievers?
3. In trying to be a positive influence on society by bringing biblical influence into popular culture, how should we manage our interactions with those immersed in it?



Pre-reading for next lesson: 1 Kings 11:26–14:31, 16:29–18:40