

DON'T BE A WISE FOOL!

Today's Text: 1 Kings, Chaps. 3-11

Extracts:

1. **“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.... And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom” [1 Kgs 4: 29, 30, 34]**
2. **“But Solomon loved many strange women... and he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned away his heart. ... Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.. but will give one tribe to thy son for David My servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen” [1 Kgs 11: 1a, 3,11,13b].**

The owner of a prosperous construction company was going on an extended vacation. So, he handed over the completion of a house near the beach to John, one of his top engineers. John had been with the company for a long time and had served very loyally. John has felt that his contribution had not been recognized or rewarded. So, he saw the new assignment as an opportunity to pay back, especially as he was going to retire in a few months’ time. He used very cheap and poor materials and refused to adequately supervise the work. Soon after the house had been completed, the owner of the company returned. John took him to the site and handed over the keys. The man threw them back at him and said, “John, you have served us well all these years. As a token of our appreciation, our company has built this house for you as a parting gift.”

Who played the fool in that story? It was John, of course. For the rest of his life, he will regret his foolish conduct in the evening of his brilliant career. A fool is not necessarily a stupid person. A fool is a person who misuses or misapplies wisdom. That is why the word of God puts it this way, “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” [Ps. 14:1]. Now, if you were to compile a list of such people, a majority of them would be top brilliant scientists and philosophers, and sophisticated liberal political leaders! The poor and the unlearned will hardly make the list!

Now, how do you classify those of us who claim to know and believe in God but go ahead to misuse the talents that He has showered upon us? In today’s study, we shall use the concept of “the wise fool” to describe such people. They are like the ostrich, which buries its head in the sand in an attempt to hide from those pursuing it! We shall use the story of Solomon to guide our discussion.

1. Who is a wise person?

We know from the scriptures that wisdom comes from God [**Prov. 2:6**]. It is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 12: 8**]. Wisdom, knowledge and understanding have a way of going hand-in-hand, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of *wisdom*, and the *knowledge* of the holy is *understanding*” [**Prov. 9: 10**]. A house is built by *wisdom* and established by *understanding*, and “by *knowledge* shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches” [**Prov. 24: 3-4**].

We also know from the scriptures that wisdom is of the heart, not of the head [**1 Kgs 3:12**]. After God had given Moses a description of the Tabernacle, He gave him the names of two craftsmen, Bezaleel (of the tribe of Judah) and Aholiab (of the tribe of Dan). Of the first, God said, “I have filled him with the Spirit of God *in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge*, and in all manner of workmanship to devise cunning works, to work in gold and in silver and in brass.” To assist Bezaleel, God chose Aholiab and told Moses, “in the hearts of all that are *wise hearted* I have put wisdom, that they *may* make all that I have commanded thee” [**Ex. 31: 1-6**].

Clearly, whatever talents we have, such as natural endowments and professional skills are a mark of God’s wisdom, given through our hearts. Interestingly, God uses the word, “may,” to describe how we can use such talents. That suggests that He will not violate our free will to use such talents for good or for bad! When we use them according to God’s plan, we are said to be wise. But when we use them otherwise, we are considered foolish. That is why the word of God has said, “A wise man’s heart is at his right hand; but a fool’s heart at his left” [**Ecc. 10: 2**]. We all know that the natural heart is on the left side of the chest! So, when we use God’s talents according to what we can see, hear, feel, smell or touch, we are using a fool’s heart. Since there is no physical heart on our right side, we can only accept that it is there by faith! Therefore, those who use their talents by faith are using the wise person’s heart. That is why Paul says that believers walk by faith and not by sight [**2 Cor. 5:7**]!

We can also use the Parable of the Two Builders to make the same point [**Matt. 7: 24-27**]. Both the wise and the foolish builders faced similar circumstances: rains, floods and winds. However, the foolish man’s house fell because it was built on sand (that is, a temporal foundation), whereas the wise man’s house stood because it was built on a rock (that is, an eternal foundation). As in the case of the rock that followed the children of Israel during the wilderness journey, this Rock is Christ [**1 Cor. 10:4**]! *Only those who use their God-given talents to glorify Him are wise!*

2. Solomon as a wise king

When Solomon ascended the throne, God appeared to him in a dream and asked what he wanted from Him. Solomon asked for “an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad” [1 Kgs 3: 5-9]. His request pleased God who said to Solomon:

Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days [1 Kgs 3: 11-14]

Those promises started to manifest themselves as soon as Solomon woke up. Here is a sample of the good things that Solomon achieved with his God-given wisdom:

- He delivered a sound judgment in the dispute between two prostitutes over a child [1 Kgs 3: 16-28]
- Solomon’s wisdom made him so famous all over the then known world that even the Queen of Sheba came to visit [1 Kgs 4: 29-31, 34; 10: 1-13]
- Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and wrote one thousand and five songs [1 Kgs 4: 32]. Some of his works are published as the books of **Proverbs, Ecclesiastes** and the **Song of Solomon**
- He built the temple of God and restored true worship there [1 Kgs, Chaps 5-9]

For behaving wisely, God granted Solomon the following blessings in accordance with His promises:

- Israel enjoyed peace, security and prosperity on all sides [1 Kgs 4: 20-28]
- Solomon was so rich that “the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold” [1 Kgs 10: 14]. In US dollars, that would run into billions, and Solomon reigned for 40 years [2 Chron. 9: 30]!
- The whole world respected Solomon and came to hear him and to seek his wise counsel [1 Kgs 10: 23-24].

3. Here comes the wise fool!

The most popular version of the Holy Bible is the King James Version, which was published in 1611. But do you know anything about the man after whom it is named? James has been described as the “wisest fool in Christendom”!¹

¹ James I (1603-25 AD), <http://www.britannia.com/history/monarchs/mon46.html>

Descended from the famous Tudors through Margaret, the daughter of Henry VII, James inherited the Scottish throne in 1567 by his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and the English throne in 1603 by his cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. He married Anne of Denmark, and one of his sons, Charles, married a Spaniard. He was on the Scottish throne for 58 years and the English for 22 years. He was the one who commissioned an Authorized Version of the Bible in English that was published in 1611.

In spite of such advantages and achievements, his reign was a monumental failure because he thrived on ambiguities. He was witty, highly educated and believed in the divine right of kings but he could not master parliament or the religious tension among Catholics and Protestants, and the Episcopalians and the Puritans. The man that popularized the Bible would make his closest advisor and homosexual partner the Duke of Buckingham! In fact, the first wave of Puritan English immigrants to North America occurred during the reign of King James I. It is no wonder that history has recorded him as the wisest fool in Christendom!

Solomon was a source of pride to God and Israel as long as he used his wisdom God's way. Unfortunately, "Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and *went not fully after the Lord*, as did David his father [1 Kgs 11: 6]. Examine those words, "went not fully after the Lord." That suggests the following possibilities:

- i. Solomon was still quite involved in worship in the temple and still believed in the true God. However, in the name of religious freedom, he allowed his foreign wives [from Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, etc] to continue to worship their idols. He in fact built pagan shrines for Chemosh, the idol of the Moabites and for Molech, the god of the Ammonites [vv. 1, 7].
- ii. Solomon actually participated in pagan worship as he slept from one wife's home to another. After all, he had one thousand wives and concubines [v. 3]!
- iii. The Queen of Sheba was said to have "communed with him of all that was in her heart" [1 Kgs 10: 2] and "king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba *all her desire, whatsoever she asked*, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty" [v. 13]. This queen was an African, traditionally regarded to have come from Ethiopia. You will recall that the Ethiopian eunuch that was baptized by Philip in Gaza was treasurer to Candace, queen of Ethiopia, and he was reading the book of **Isaiah** [Acts 8: 26-38]. That suggests earlier contacts between Ethiopia and Jerusalem. We also know that many black Jews have in recent times immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia. Could these have been the descendants of Solomon by the Queen of Sheba that Solomon gave "all her desire, whatsoever she asked"? I don't know!

Whatever, Solomon was no longer behaving like the wise-hearted man that God had endowed him. He had become a wise fool!

4. Lessons for us

We are all in danger of being wise fools as long as we are growing and assuming challenging positions in government, business, church and society. Let us take a few examples:

a) *A Christian Head of State in a Democratic Society*

Taking popular positions elects politicians. In a democratic system, such positions may not be in line with the word of God. For example, in the West today, there are big debates over same-sex marriages and birth control. In the United States, the Supreme Court has declared as unconstitutional sodomy laws under which gay practices had been outlawed in the State of Texas. In several European countries, same-sex marriages are legally allowed, and Canada is considering the same law. In almost the entire West, abortion is legally permissible.

Now, if a Christian government leader, in the name of freedom and political votes, supports such issues, even when he or she does not practise them, can he or she claim to be any different from Solomon? *In the sight of God*, they have not fully obeyed Him. They are wise fools.

b) *The Christian marriage counselor*

A young couple are in a distressed marriage and are hell-bent on divorce. They come to a marriage counselor who is in her private life happily married and a practising Christian. What should she tell the young couple?

As a professional, she may look at the couple's circumstances and advise reconciliation or divorce. It is true that she cannot force them to stay together if they do not want it. But, as a true believer, should she be the instrument to accelerate their break-up? Again, our marriage counselor will find herself not any different from the old king Solomon!

c) *A Christian accountant at ENRON!*

Instead of preparing the accounts in accordance with the available information and applicable laws, a Christian accountant condones or even participates in cooking the books to turn a loss-making business into a highly profitable one. Christian professionals are perpetrating such fraud in revenue offices in government, business and the church. The cover-up may be discovered and punished as in the case of ENRON. In most cases,

however, the truth may never be known. But *in the sight of God*, the believers that are involved are wise fools!

We are all in danger of misapplying our God-given wisdom. Solomon did and he was punished. The kingdom that took so much to build collapsed soon after his death, and it was by the grace of God that Judah was spared to carry on the spark of true worship far into the future. If God did not spare Solomon, the wisest man in history, what is our hope?

5. Conclusion

Whether it was Adam or Solomon or King James I, failure came the *moment* they deviated from the path of truth and obedience. That moment comes when we think that we have made it! David fell after he had ascended the throne. Solomon fell in his old age. So, as you grow older in age, marriage, government, business or ministry, be very careful because you are approaching the slippery slope!

Speaking through Jeremiah, God said, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. *But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these do I delight*” [Jer. 9: 23-24].

Yes, you are free but should you behave freely? God has built you up by His wisdom. Do you want to destroy it by foolishness? Don't be a wise fool! Behave wisely.