

1 Kings 3:1-4

V.1- 3 Solomon's state.

He begins to flex his political muscles.

It is compelling to think that Israel, the nation once enslaved by Egypt, has grown to a state to where they find it appealing and acceptable to consider marriage as a way of aligning themselves with their one time enemy.

OH! How this speaks to our own spiritual conditions as well!

To marry a member of foreign royalty was to bind their two houses together politically. This was done for many reasons - to consolidate power, favorable trade, to avoid conflict, etc.

Rarely was marriage entered into strictly because of love. Our modern notions of romantic love have only begun to gain popularity in the last few hundred years. There are still places in the world where romantic love is not adequate grounds for marriage.

Whatever Solomon's true motives were, we know that this would not be his only wife, it was probably not even his first wife. Many others would follow and eventually this would turn his heart away from following God.

This behavior, polygamy, had been modeled for him by his father David - who also had many wives and concubines.

We have to understand that the Bible doesn't endorse this behavior as admirable or virtuous but it faithfully documents common failures of humanity - especially those who are kings, judges, rulers, priests - so that when we see our perfect king, Jesus, we see how unspotted He truly is.

IMAGINE! What if the Bible recorded our lives along with all of our missteps AND our intimate moments with God?

Do we love Him? Yes! Well...maybe not as completely as we would like sometimes. Do we fail? Yes! Maybe not completely as we perceive; but then again, maybe so. Is God merciful to us? Absolutely.

God's grace reaches to the best and worst parts of humanity. We don't deserve His favor and yet it is awarded to us on the basis of His perfect will.

So many people ask the question, "Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?" This question is presented for one reason or another - perhaps sincere concern or perhaps attempting to play "stump the chump."

But the flaw with this question is that it rests on the presumption that we are intrinsically good people.

Sometimes a better question to ask might be, "Why does God allow good things to happen to bad people, or mediocre people?"

We are all beggars for God's grace and mercy. We are, in Christ, recipients of far more than we deserve in our wayward lives. This is true for Solomon and David as well.

Why does God bless and establish David and Solomon's kingdom? Because they were examples of sinners in need of

grace and mercy whose lives were held together only by the will and word of God.

Along with political nation building Solomon also pours his efforts into building up his kingdom physically - new construction is in the works in Jerusalem.

Note: Jerusalem was not possessed by Israel until 2 Samuel 5 - when David took the city that was occupied by the Jebusites. So they haven't occupied Jerusalem for very long at all.

We also call Bethlehem the City of David because he was born there (1 Samuel 17).

As we get a picture of Solomon's state and his priorities we also see the state of the people - we see their relationship with Jehovah. We see how they are worshipping.

As we are considering their worship it is important to remember that the Bible doesn't capture every single moment of every single day of everybody's lives; but being divinely inspired, it does bring into focus what is important to God's heart.

These people had lived thousands of little moments in the eyes of God as His special chosen people but the Scriptures make a point to capture for us their worship.

We see that the people, and Solomon, continue to worship God at what the Bible calls, “the high places.”

These “high places” had a mixed history relative to how God’s people worshipped.

The Law gave strict instructions on worshipping at places where pagans worshipped. They were not to be used for worship in Israel. In fact they were supposed to be destroyed.

[Deu 12:2-11, 13-14 NKJV] 2 "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3 "And you shall destroy their altars, break their [sacred] pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. 4 "You shall not worship the LORD your God

[with] such [things]. 5 "But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. 6 "There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. 7 "And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. 8 "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today--every man doing whatever [is] right in his own eyes-- 9 "for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. 10 "But [when] you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, 11 "then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD."

Commentators seem to be of different opinions on whether or not this was acceptable worship because of the ambiguity of these high places. It is not explicitly clear on whether these were new places of worship established by the Israelites after the manner of their forefathers or if they were re-purposed pagan sites.

“The high places were altars erected on natural or artificial eminences, probably from the idea that men were brought nearer to the Deity. They had been used by the patriarchs, and had become so universal among the heathen that they were almost identified with idolatry. They were prohibited in the law (Le 17:3, 4; De 12:13, 14; Je 7:31; Le 17:3, 4, De 12:13, 14, Ez 6:3, 4; Ho 10:8).” Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 214). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

What we can certainly take away from this is a measure of uncertainty of where and how to worship even though they had the Law. It appears that this form of worship was commonly accepted by the people, perhaps even traditional, but was it the RIGHT THING? Was it right worship?

The answer to that question depends on a right understanding of God's revelation about Himself and the faith of the worshipper.

In that regard not much has changed over the millenia.

It is important that we make this distinction because we can't simply say that "what makes worship right is the condition of our hearts." The Bible tells us that the heart is deceitful above all things.

We also can't say that it is sincerity that makes worship right - there are many sincere people who worship false gods.

The summation of God's revelation about Himself and our right understanding of who He is, is captured in Jesus' words to a Samaritan woman - who also worshipped at "the high places."

[Jhn 4:20-24 NKJV] 20 "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you [Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 "You worship what you do not

know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 "God [is] Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The point of the Law prohibiting certain aspects of worship was not to keep the people from worshipping but to keep them from worshipping other gods and goddesses. It was designed to keep them safe, from wrong worship.

God, knowing the heart of humanity, knows that where people worship impacts who they worship. Ultimately this type of worship leads to an ill-informed, pantheistic view of worship where "all roads lead to God."

People even make that claim today - we all worship the same God. It is not so. We worship the God of Scriptures, the existing one, who is Spirit and is Truth.

V.4 We see that Solomon returns to the tabernacle of meeting at Gibeon - this was essentially their “mobile” temple that was carried throughout the land during Israel’s travels.

Ref. [2Ch 1:2-6 NKJV] 2 And Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, to the judges, and to every leader in all Israel, the heads of the fathers' [houses]. 3 Then Solomon, and all the assembly with him, went to the high place that [was] at Gibeon; for the tabernacle of meeting with God was there, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. 4 But David had brought up the ark of God from Kirjath Jearim to [the place] David had prepared for it, for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. 5 Now the bronze altar that Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD; Solomon and the assembly sought Him [there]. 6 And Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before the LORD, which [was] at the tabernacle of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

Think about it - at this time the ark is in Jerusalem, the tabernacle is in Gibeon, and then there are a multitude of high-places where people are also worshipping. It’s quite confusing. If only there

were a singular place, a singular focus! This will eventually lead to the establishment of the Temple in Jerusalem. Ultimately, this points to Jesus - the singular way for humanity to have a right relationship with God.

On a massive scale we see in these verses Israel's desire to meet with God.

Regarding this condition for seeking, worshipping, establishing places of worship, and meeting with God, Matthew Henry writes:

“David kept to the ark, and did not care for the high places, but Solomon, though in other things he walked in the statutes of his father, in this came short of him. He showed thereby a great zeal for sacrificing, but to obey would have been better. ” Henry, M. (1994). Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume (p. 485). Peabody: Hendrickson.

The beauty of living in the church age is that God dwells with and in His people by the Holy Spirit. No longer do we look to a location, or a temple, or a high place, but as Paul writes [1Co 3:16

NKJV] “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

As previously remarked upon, Solomon sacrificed greatly at Gibeon. He killed and burned 1000 animals there.

The burnt-offerings of the Old Testament are symbolically significant relative to our understanding of God, His relationship with us, and the Atonement made for mankind in the body of Jesus Christ.

The Hebrew term used to denote a burnt offering can literally mean, “‘ascending,’ the whole [offering] being consumed by fire, and regarded as ascending to God while being consumed. Part of every offering was burnt in the sacred fire, but this was wholly burnt...It was the most frequent form of sacrifice...” (Easton’s Bible Dictionary).

This must’ve been viewed as a tremendous act of worship. And we know that even if Solomon would sacrifice 1000 animals times 1000 animals it would never be enough to reconcile mankind to

God. It can only point the way to a better sacrifice found at the cross.

As the author of Hebrews writes about the purpose of the Old Testament Law, the sacrifices, the animals and how all of that reminds us of our sin:

[Heb 10:1-6 NKJV] 1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, [and] not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those [sacrifices there is] a reminder of sins every year. 4 For [it is] not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and [sacrifices] for sin You had no pleasure.

The act of worship - the killing, the blood, the fire, the offering, the flesh being consumed, all of that is spiritually significant as it points to Christ. But the physical act of worship is not primarily

what God pleases God. God is primarily interested in the heart of the worshipper.

[Isa 66:1-4 NKJV] 1 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven [is] My throne, And earth [is] My footstool. Where [is] the house that you will build Me? And where [is] the place of My rest? 2 For all those [things] My hand has made, And all those [things] exist," Says the LORD. "But on this [one] will I look: On [him who is] poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word. 3 "He who kills a bull [is as if] he slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb, [as if] he breaks a dog's neck; He who offers a grain offering, [as if he offers] swine's blood; He who burns incense, [as if] he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, And their soul delights in their abominations, 4 So will I choose their delusions, And bring their fears on them; Because, when I called, no one answered, When I spoke they did not hear; But they did evil before My eyes, And chose [that] in which I do not delight."

So the prophet Isaiah gives us a contrast of sorts. We are presented with one who is poor and of a contrite spirit who possesses an awe and reverence for God's word.

Of these poor in spirit Jesus teaches: Matt 5:3 "Blessed [are] the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

On the flip side, those whom God views as divorced from Him are those who focus on the physical sacrifice, the physical doing, which is described as an abomination, detestable, filthy, in God's eyes.

Those things that are supposed to bring a remembrance of God (cf. Isa 43) have become the thing that people fixate on and actually defile God's people. People worship the created thing, the ordinance, the custom, rather than the Creator who is above all. There are still many Christians today who fall in this category.

But now we have a perfect High Priest, a perfect King who has fulfilled those shadowy ordinances once and for all, not a thousand times, but once and for all!

It is through Christ that we see the perfect kingdom by His perfect sacrifice. It is by Him we know God as Spirit and Truth. It is by Him that we are able to worship rightly.

[Heb 9:11-14 NKJV] 11 But Christ came [as] High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?