



SESSION 2

SOLOMON: UNFAILING WISDOM

▶ ***The Point***

Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.

▶ ***The Passage***

1 Kings 3:3-14; 4:29-34

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

In a single day, most of us can become well-informed in virtually any subject. The sleeping patterns of the aardvark; the inner-workings of a carburetor; the preparation of crème brûlée; the gravitational pull of Mars—thanks to the Internet, we can accumulate enough knowledge on any of these subjects to have a stimulating conversation at any dinner party. We're flooded with information of all kinds, and we're continually exchanging knowledge. Every second of every day, six thousand tweets are tweeted, over forty thousand Google queries are searched, and more than two million emails are sent.⁴

In short, we're swimming in an ocean of knowledge while dying of thirst for wisdom. Knowledge and wisdom are two very different things, and wisdom is by far the more valuable of the two. As we'll see in the life of Solomon, relying on God's wisdom must become second nature to us so that our lives, and not just our intellect, reflect who God is and who He has called us to be.

▶ ***The Setting***

As King David's death approached, a power struggle arose concerning who would become the next king. His son Adonijah set himself up to succeed his father as king. Bathsheba, David's wife, appealed to David to name their son Solomon to be the next king. The prophet Nathan joined her in intervening on Solomon's behalf, and David granted their request. As David neared death, he gave final instructions to Solomon, urging him to live in God's ways, keeping His law. Following David's death, the Lord appeared to Solomon.

What does the Bible say?

High places (3:3)—Elevated sites that had been Canaanite places of worship. God had directed the Israelites to destroy the high places (see Num. 33:52), but they had not done so, often worshiping there instead.

A little child (3:7)—The Hebrew word was used of newborns, little boys, and males of marriageable age. It does not specify a definite age and likely sometimes has the sense of immaturity.

1 Kings 3:3-14; 4:29-34

³³ Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. ⁴ And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." ⁶ And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. ⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. ⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" ¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. ¹⁴ And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

^{4:29} And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, ³⁰ so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.

³¹ For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. ³² He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. ³³ He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. ³⁴ And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

1 Kings 3:3-9 Commentary

Pray for wisdom and discernment.

[Verses 3-4] Solomon followed David's final instructions to him; he evidenced his love for God by living according to the **statutes** David had followed—the commandments God had given. **Only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places.** Sacrificing on the high places went against the law, but the writer implied Solomon's doing so was mitigated by the temple's absence. Solomon **went to Gibeon to sacrifice.** The tabernacle the Israelites had constructed in the wilderness and had brought into Canaan was in Gibeon. With the bronze altar also placed there, Gibeon **was the great high place.** Solomon **used to offer a thousand burnt offerings** on the altar at Gibeon. Burnt offerings were made morning, evening, and on special occasions. They required perfect animals: young bulls, lambs, goats, turtledoves, or pigeons. The person offering the sacrifice placed a hand on it, signifying the offering was taking the person's place. Thus, the individual was offering himself. The whole offering was consumed. This sacrifice was designed to provide forgiveness of sins and to restore a right relationship with God. Solomon's numerous sacrifices likely represented his petition that God bless his reign.

[Verses 5-6] On one of Solomon's pilgrimages to Gibeon, **the LORD** (*Yahweh*, the covenant God) **appeared to him in a dream.** The covenant-making, covenant-keeping God invited Solomon to request a gift from Him. The king's sacrifices likely were accompanied by his prayers for God's blessing on him. In his dream, God directed Solomon to ask for a specific blessing. God's offer was a test of Solomon's priorities and a readiness to provide the help he needed. Solomon began his response to God's offer with an affirmation of the Lord's **steadfast love**, which translates a Hebrew word that almost defies definition. It can be translated "goodness," "covenant love," "kindness," or "loving kindness." It is close to the New Testament concept of grace.

[Verse 7] The king addressed God as **LORD my God**, acknowledging Him as the covenant God and as sovereign. The king expressed humility by calling himself God's **servant**, His subject ready to do His bidding. **Little child** expresses a range of ages. Suggestions concerning Solomon's age at the time of his dream include 12, 14, and 20. Most likely he was about 20 years old. Solomon acknowledged he did **not know how to go out or come in**—how to conduct himself among the people and to administer the nation's affairs.

[Verses 8-9] Again acknowledging he was God's **servant**, Solomon cited Israel's expanding population as a reason he needed God's help. In light of his inexperience and his people's growth in numbers, Solomon asked for **an understanding mind** (literally, "a hearing heart"). In Hebrew thought, the heart was the center of a person's life, the seat of intellect, will, and emotions. Solomon requested that at the center of his life, he consistently would recognize and obey God's leading. In effect, he asked for wisdom. Practical wisdom would enable Solomon **to govern** his people. **To discern between good and evil** (right and wrong) probably referred to making sound legal decisions.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Kings 3:10-14

¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. ¹⁴ And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

READ: 1 Kings 3:10-14 on page 78 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 78 of the PSG: **"When has God given you more than you asked for?"**

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read through the bullet list on pages 78 and 80 in order to see three important things that stand out about Solomon's request for wisdom.

RECAP: Read aloud the final two paragraphs on page 80 of the PSG:

The end result of Solomon's prayer is that God granted his request. Thankfully, our God still delights not only in hearing from His people, but in giving them what they need. For that reason, when we approach the throne of God's grace, we should examine ourselves to see if we're asking humbly, in a way that makes much of God, and that will benefit others.

Such an attitude in our prayers both demonstrates and produces wisdom in our lives.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What makes wisdom worth having?

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 80 of the PSG: **"How do we gain and apply wisdom in our daily lives?"**

TRANSITION: As we jump to 1 Kings 4:29-34, we'll see some of the effects of Solomon's wisdom on the world around him.

1 Kings 3:10-14 Commentary

God give us wisdom.

[Verses 10-11] Solomon's request for a receptive heart (practical wisdom) **pleased** God; He viewed Solomon's decision as a good one. Solomon already displayed a high degree of maturity in his choice of the gift he wanted and needed. God commended him for his choice. Instead of asking for **long life, riches**, or the lives (destruction) of his enemies, the king had requested **understanding to discern what is right**.

Discernment was perception and insight. The term **discern** had the sense of receptiveness to hear God. Solomon wanted the ability to render fair judgments in cases brought to him. He wanted to be sensitive to God's leading and to have the necessary insight to decide rightly.

[Verse 12] Because of Solomon's excellent choice of the gift he wanted God to give him, God would grant his request. God would make Solomon skillful in administering the nation's affairs and give him keen perception in reaching decisions. God also would elevate Solomon to unprecedented greatness. God's statement that **none like [Solomon had] been before ... and none ... [would] arise after** has been interpreted to refer to the entire human race, or as referring just to Israel's kings.

[Verse 13] God's response to Solomon's choice went far beyond what the king could have imagined. Solomon had not asked for **riches and honor**, but God would give him both. Solomon's later wealth was not attributed to his trading skills or his gifts as a leader, but to God's gift of wisdom. As long as Solomon lived, no other kingdom's leader would attain Solomon's stature.

[Verse 14] God's third gift to Solomon would hinge on a condition. God would **lengthen [his] days** if he lived according to God's **ways** and obeyed His **statutes and commandments** as David had done. God's "ways" were His paths or roads; the term referred to a specific manner of life. Solomon would need to follow God's guidelines for his life and render faithful service to Him. God's statutes or decrees were what was due Him. His commands were the code of law He had given the Israelites.

God gives wisdom to His people when they ask and are open to receive it. (See Jas. 1:5.) He imparts it to us through the Scriptures and through the Holy Spirit, who helps us understand the Scriptures.

1 Kings 4:29-34 Commentary

Others benefit when we share God's wisdom.

[Verse 29] The writer of 1 Kings heaped up words to emphasize God's following through in fulfilling Solomon's request for guidance in ruling Israel. God gave him **wisdom**—the practical ability to decide the best course of action. God also gave Solomon **understanding beyond measure**—literally, “exceeding much” keen perception that allowed him to solve difficult problems. The capacity of **breadth of mind**—literally, “breadth (or largeness) of heart”—was the comprehensive ability to absorb diverse factual information. The phrase **like the sand on the seashore** was a common expression that indicated something beyond numbering or measuring, an incredible abundance.

[Verse 30] Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all others. **The people of the east** could refer to the inhabitants of Arabia or Babylonia; to the Arameans, who lived in what is now known as Syria and in areas of Babylon; or to the tribes that lived southeast of the Dead Sea. The phrase **all the wisdom of Egypt** was meant to indicate the tremendous scope of Egyptian knowledge, including geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and astrology. Their knowledge also extended to the areas of medicine and natural science. Solomon's surpassing Egyptian knowledge was no light achievement and occurred because of God's gift to him.

[Verse 31] No other person equaled Solomon in the area of wisdom. The writer of 1 Kings named four individuals who were renowned for their wisdom. Little is known about these men beyond the meanings of their names. Ethan means “long-lived”; Heman means “faithful”; and Darda may mean “pearl of knowledge.” (The meaning of Calcol is uncertain.) The word Mahol means “place of dancing” and could refer to the father of the three famous wise men or to an occupation or an orchestral guild—men who danced as part of worship rituals. Whatever their specific identities, all four men apparently were focused on the pursuit of knowledge and were well-known for being wise. Solomon's **fame** for exceptional wisdom spread to the nations around Israel.

[Verses 32-33] Solomon was a prolific writer, composing **3,000 proverbs** and **1,005 psalms or songs**. Solomon has been associated with much of the wisdom literature in Israel. His name became connected to the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). The Book of Psalms includes two songs attributed to him. (See Pss. 72; 127.) Solomon's writings encompassed widely varying subjects, including **trees**, and the animal kingdom, which the Hebrews divided into four classes: **beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish**. Thus, his research included the natural world's flora and fauna. Solomon's interests and observations were quite comprehensive.

[Verse 34] The writer of 1 Kings highly stressed Solomon's reputation for superior wisdom. Much as we sometimes say, “The whole town was there,” or “Everybody agrees,” the writer used the phrases **all nations** and **all the kings of the earth** for emphasis. Rulers of territories outside Israel **had heard** about Solomon's great **wisdom** and had sent representatives to **hear** as he taught his wisdom. God had done what Solomon asked earlier at Gibeon—and then some.

