

King Solomon's Request for Wisdom

1 Kings 3

1 Kings 3:1-4 - *"Now Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh's daughter; then he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall all around Jerusalem. Meanwhile the people sacrificed at the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the LORD until those days. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places. Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar."*

Background Notes

King Solomon is well known for his wisdom. In fact, Solomon is often described as "the wisest person who ever lived." This chapter tells us why Solomon was the wisest king. It wasn't genetics or university training. His wisdom was a gift from the Lord. Solomon requested wisdom and the Lord gave him wisdom. Verse 12: *"Behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart."* We'll look more closely at Solomon's request for wisdom and a demonstration of that wisdom under doctrinal points, but first we need a little background for verses 1-4.

For political reasons, young Solomon married an Egyptian princess. This may have been a good political move, but it was not a good decision for Solomon's relationship with the Lord. God's Law said that Hebrews were not to intermarry with people of foreign pagan cultures. Why not? God knew that with intermarriage, it wouldn't be long before the false religions would creep into Israel and steal the hearts of the Jewish people away from the Lord. And that's exactly what happened. In fact, Solomon married many foreign wives, and they turned his heart away from the Lord. (Read 1 Kings 11.)

But at this point Solomon loved the Lord, and he walked in the steps of his father David (v3). However, not only did he marry a pagan wife, but verse 3 says he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places. The high places in Israel were the hilltops where people offered sacrifices to the Lord - another departure from God's Law. In Deuteronomy 12 God said when Israel entered the Promised Land, His people were to offer sacrifices only at the central sanctuary. But at this point God tolerated sacrifices that were made to the Lord from the high places because the Temple was not yet built, and there was no permanent central sanctuary in Israel.

2 Chronicles 1 says that at this time, the Ark of the Covenant was in Israel in a tent that David had made for it, but the Tabernacle and the bronze altar were at the great high place at Gibeon, about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. So

Solomon went to sacrifice to the Lord at Gibeon on the true altar of the Lord there, and it was here that the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night.

Doctrinal Points

1. The wisdom of God is available upon request.

1 Kings 3:5-15 - *“At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’ And Solomon said: ‘You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.*

Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?’

The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: ‘Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.’ Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.”

Solomon was a young king at this time, probably only about twenty years old. The Lord gave Solomon a “blank check” - *“Ask! What shall I give you?”* (v5). If you were Solomon, what would you have asked for? Money? Long life? Power? Solomon knew that he had a big job ahead of him, and that he needed help from the Lord. So Solomon asked God for wisdom - and the Lord was pleased with his request.

The Lord is pleased when we ask Him for wisdom. And guess what? The wisdom of God is available upon request! Listen to the promise of James 1:5, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him.”* What a great promise! If we come to the Lord by faith, with an undivided heart, and ask Him for wisdom about any situation we’re facing, the Lord will give us wisdom. Maybe you’re facing a difficult problem in your family, or there’s a difficult problem in your church or fellowship. Or you may need to make an important decision.

It may be a test of our faith. Whatever the case may be, we may come by faith and bring the situation before the Lord. He will give us insight, and understanding, and direction, because the wisdom of God is available upon request.

2. The wisdom of God always does the right thing.

1 Kings 3:16-28 - *“Now two women who were harlots came to the king, and stood before him. And one woman said, ‘O my lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then it happened, the third day after I had given birth, that this woman also gave birth. And we were together; no one was with us in the house, except the two of us in the house. And this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from my side, while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead. But when I had examined him in the morning, indeed, he was not my son whom I had borne.’*

Then the other woman said, ‘No! But the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son.’ And the first woman said, ‘No! But the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son.’ Thus they spoke before the king. And the king said, ‘The one says, ‘This is my son, who lives, and your son is the dead one’; and the other says, ‘No! But your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one.’” Then the king said, ‘Bring me a sword.’ So they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, ‘Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other.’

Then the woman whose son was living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, ‘O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!’ But the other said, ‘Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him.’ So the king answered and said, ‘Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother.’

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered, and they feared the king for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.”

This is a great Bible story, isn't it? It's just one example of Solomon's wisdom. What would you have done, if you had been in Solomon's place? I probably would have sent royal servants to check with the women's neighbors, or try to re-create the event to see who was really telling the truth. But not Solomon! "Bring me a sword; cut the baby in two!" What wisdom! The true mother was known instantly. That's wisdom in operation! We would never have thought of this approach. But then again, we're not Solomon.

Note the last verse of the chapter, where the people saw that the *“wisdom of God was in Solomon to administer justice.”* The wisdom of God is righteous. It always does the right thing. That's exactly what James 3:17 says about the wisdom of God. *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”*

The wisdom of God always does the right thing, so don't be fooled into making bad decisions. James 1:6-8 goes on to say, *"But when you ask [for wisdom], you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do."*

Sometimes when we have to make decisions, our hearts and thoughts are divided - we're *"tossed like a wave of the sea."* One option may seem right, or it may "feel" right - by natural or worldly standards. But with the "wisdom from above" - God's wisdom - we know it's not pure or righteous or just. The wisdom of God always leads us to do the right thing. It is always righteous and just.

So be careful when you're making decisions. It is clearly not righteous or pure to make a decision that involves compromising the truth, or shady dealing, or under-handed methods, or hypocritical behavior. It is essential for believers to request - and follow - the wisdom of God, because the wisdom of God always does the right thing.

Practical Application

Count your many blessings - name them one by one!

That's the title of a well-known hymn, "Count Your Blessings." The hymn says, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done."

When Solomon asked for wisdom, the Lord was pleased and **He gave Solomon more than he asked for!** This can still be true for believers today. The Lord doesn't guarantee health and wealth for the believer today, but He has promised to bless us, and He has promised to be with us and care for us, and He has promised to give us wisdom from above if we ask for it with an undivided heart.

And - He gives us more than we ask for! Look at the amazing words of Romans 8:31-32 - *"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"*

Did you ever take time out to specifically "count your blessings"? A few days ago while I was driving I did exactly that. Just as the hymn says, I was amazed at how much the Lord has done! Blessings that I hadn't even prayed about came to mind, one by one! The Lord has given me many more blessings than I ever asked for!

What about you? Count your many blessings - name them one by one!