

1.4

SOLOMON ASKS FOR WISDOM

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's wisdom contains every blessing we need.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will seek God's wisdom in every area of life.



FOCUS VERSE: I Kings 3:9

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

LESSON TEXT: I Kings 3:5-28



BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: I Kings 3:5-28

King Solomon has become synonymous with wise leadership. Even Jesus referenced Solomon as a bastion of great wisdom (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31). Solomon was also renowned for his wealth and splendor, which Jesus also referenced (Matthew 6:29; Luke 12:27). However, it was Solomon's desire for wisdom that resulted in his wealth and extravagant lifestyle. At least near the beginning of his kingship, Solomon's motivations were pure; he bore witness to his father's wise and successful reign, and David had taught Solomon to love wisdom.

Immediately after the story of Solomon's request for wisdom, the writer of I Kings recorded an example of Solomon's wisdom. Despite Solomon being a wealthy and stately king, two prostitutes found an audience in Solomon's court, and Solomon used a clever method to provide a just and wise judgment. Solomon's interaction with the two women might be a foreshadowing of the merciful and fair treatment Christ would give toward disreputable women in the New Testament. Jesus showed wisdom in His treatment of the Samaritan woman in John 4 and the adulterous woman in John 8.

Solomon's judgment in the case of the two prostitutes caused Solomon's wise leadership to be spoken about across the country. All of Israel "stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice" (I Kings 3:28, ESV). God's wisdom always results in justice. As the prophet Amos famously wrote, "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24).

It is noteworthy that Solomon's request for wisdom in I Kings 3 and II Chronicles 1 was specifically for wisdom to rule the people of Israel. Despite this noble request, Solomon's downfall came in his lack of ability to rule his own self. Solomon's proclivity to carnal appetite was out of control; he had a combined total of a thousand wives and concubines throughout his life (I Kings 11:3). These foreign wives would eventually turn Solomon's heart away from God and toward pagan idols. Solomon never failed to wisely guide Israel. However, he tragically failed to apply the same wisdom to his own life and family.

**GOD'S WISDOM ALWAYS RESULTS
IN JUSTICE.**

DAY 1

I Kings 3:5-7

⁵ In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

⁶ And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

⁷ And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

Biblical Insight

Solomon's request notably began with a recollection of his father David's experiences. The words "mercy" and "kindness" in verse 6 are translated from the same Hebrew word, *hesed*. Other translations of this word include "steadfast love" (ESV), "faithfulness" (NASB), and less common, "loyalty" (NET). This multifaceted word speaks of longsuffering, faithfulness, undeserved mercy and grace, and unmerited favor and goodness. Solomon recognized he desperately needed God's *hesed* before he needed wisdom to be successful as a king. Solomon recognized his lack of inherent qualifications to reign other than his lineage. His humility helped make him the right king to lead God's people.

Daily Devotion

After the collapse of the aristocratic rule in feudal Japan, the Samurai became the highest-ranking social caste. They were armed with more than weapons; they had a code of honor: the Code of Bushido, or "The Way of the Warrior." According to Bushido, true warriors had to recognize that living by higher standards and codes of honor meant comparison was never an option. Solomon recognized his kingly responsibilities meant leading by a higher standard than merely resting on his family name.

In our bare-minimum society, this mentality of resting on our laurels can creep into our relationship with God. In Matthew 6, Jesus told His disciples, "When you give . . . when you pray . . . when you fast." He said when, not if. The bare minimum for followers of Jesus is giving, praying, and fasting, yet we often struggle in these areas.

We have the armor of God. We are in a spiritual war. Let us go beyond the bare minimums and live by the higher standards of God's Word.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

I Kings 3:8-9

⁸ And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

⁹ Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

Biblical Insight

Solomon recognized that the people of the country he governed were ultimately led by God first. God chose them long before Solomon existed and would continue to choose them long after Solomon was gone. Solomon's reference to God's people as unable to "be numbered nor counted for multitude" may be a reference to David's misguided attempt to make a census of Israel only a few years earlier. (See II Samuel 24:1-25; I Chronicles 21:1-28.) Solomon would have been old enough to remember this occurrence and would not dare to attempt to number God's people like his father had.

Daily Devotion

Over one hundred years before Neil Armstrong, the *New York Sun* published six articles announcing the discovery of life on the moon. According to these reports, English astronomer Sir John Hershel had published articles in the *Edinburgh Journal of Science* claiming furry creatures with bat wings inhabited a moon full of giant amethyst crystals, lush vegetation, and running water. For weeks Americans believed there was life on the moon.

After scientists looked a little closer, the *Sun* revealed that Sir John Hershel did not exist. Everything was a hoax. The readers' fascination with space and hope of new scientific discoveries allowed them to be fooled by a story they failed to recognize as satire.

David's hope was in his military might, but Solomon understood God was His hope. Sometimes misplaced hope can cloud our ability to discern. We must base our hope on God's Word and trust Him for all we need.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

I Kings 3:12-15

¹² behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

Biblical Insight

Solomon ruled with absolute power, although David had offended many other leaders in Israel, including some of his other children, by appointing Solomon to the throne. Furthermore, the unity Israel experienced under David and Solomon was unique. Israel rarely experienced such unity throughout the Old Testament. Solomon's request for wisdom to lead God's people indicates he recognized this unique situation. Even though God had honored Israel's request for a king, Solomon's request for wisdom demonstrated he understood that no king was able to rule Israel by human knowledge alone; God's wisdom was the only way to rule God's people.

Daily Devotion

On Christmas Day in 1957, the relationship between the British monarch and her subjects shifted forever. Queen Elizabeth II aired her Christmas address on live television from her home in Sandringham. The Queen expressed she did not want to be like kings and queens of old who were remote figures. She desired, if only for a few minutes, to welcome the people into her life. For the first time, everyday British subjects were given a rare, humanizing glimpse into her royal residence.

Queen Elizabeth II and historians alike mark this Christmas address as a paradigm shift from viewing the monarch as a ruler to one of symbolic support for ordinary people. Because the monarch was willing to interact in a new way with her subjects, a new kind of intimacy grew in the relationship between the Crown and the masses.

Absence and distance between leaders and followers hinder respect and loyalty. To build trust and respect, leaders must be present. They must show love and be devoted to the people they lead.

How present are you in the lives of those you lead or influence?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

I Kings 3:16–19, 22

¹⁶ Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.

¹⁷ And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.

¹⁸ And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.

¹⁹ And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it.

...

²² And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king.

Biblical Insight

The imagery of two prostitutes gaining an audience before the king should not be quickly overlooked. Their low social status should have prohibited them from the king's court, but despite his riches and fame, Solomon was not a king separated from his people. Solomon's request for wisdom to lead God's people came with a responsibility to be accessible to the people he governed. Even though these women were prostitutes, Solomon gave a fair judgment. Solomon put the same effort into this case as he would have if the women had been of high social status.

Daily Devotion

In 399 BC, the "trial of the century" revolved around wisdom and was recorded in Plato's *Apology*. Socrates, one of the most important philosophers in Western history, was accused of corrupting the youth through his philosophy. In the trial, Socrates revealed that when he was declared the wisest human alive, he embarked on a quest to find someone wiser than himself. Although people had skills and areas of expertise, they assumed they were wise in other areas, such as government policies. Their assumptions were wrong. Socrates concluded that he was wiser than others in one manner: he was aware of his own ignorance.

Biblically speaking, awareness of ignorance is not where wisdom begins, but wisdom does require humility: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). When we fear the Lord, we will humble ourselves, recognize our own limitations, and surrender ourselves fully to God. Humility keeps us reliant on God, the source of true wisdom.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

I Kings 3:25-28

²⁵ And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.

²⁶ Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

²⁷ Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof.

²⁸ And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

Biblical Insight

Solomon's shrewd method of discerning the child's mother demonstrated his understanding of human nature. He knew the real parent would have a maternal reaction to such brutality against her child. The child's true mother would fight for her child's right to live, even if another person raised her own baby. The liar wouldn't care as much. After all, her biological child had already died. We presume Solomon would not have actually divided the child; God condemned other nations for such abominable activity against children. (See Leviticus 18:21.)

Daily Devotion

In 1916, Ole Kirk Christiansen opened a furniture shop. In 1924, his sons accidentally set a pile of wood chips on fire which destroyed the shop and family home. Christiansen built a larger workshop, and then the world spiraled into an economic depression. Three years later, Christiansen's wife died.

Amid despair, he developed a love for toy making and made it his life's work. He renamed his company *leg godt*, which means "play well." After World War II, he invented a toy called Automatic Binding Brick, which eventually became known as LEGO. Christiansen's invention never would have happened without the fire that nearly shattered his dreams.

In I Kings 3, the real mother's dream of surrendering her baby to another woman nearly shattered her, but God blessed Solomon with wisdom to know how to restore to her what was rightfully hers. If your dreams have been shattered, remember that your story is not over yet. God knows how to bring about all things for good. Ask God to restore you and what is rightfully yours.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*
