

Lesson 86

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule his people.

Overview

Lesson Focus

When God offered to give Solomon whatever he asked for, Solomon asked for understanding to rule his people. God granted his request, making Solomon wiser than anyone before or after him.

Key Passages

1 Kings 3:9–10, 3:12–13, 3:27

Memory Verse

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

The book of 1 Kings begins at the end of King David's life. After ruling over Israel for 40 years, David died, and his son by Bathsheba, Solomon, became the next king (1 Kings 2:10–12). This was according to God's perfect purpose and plan. David knew that the Lord had ordained this son to be the next king, that this son would have rest from his enemies, and that he would be the one to build a house for God's name (1 Chronicles 22:7–11).

This transition from David to Solomon was not without drama. In opposition to God's will and David's desires, another son of David, Adonijah, presumed to be king. Born next after Absalom but to a different mother, Adonijah shared Absalom's handsome appearance, desire for the throne, and pride (1 Kings 1:5–6). He took over the role without his father's knowledge—through treacherous means (1 Kings 1:18–19). In response to Adonijah's attempted coup, David called for Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, and Benaiah, who was over David's bodyguard (1 Chronicles 11:22–25). David commanded that they take Solomon and anoint him as king (1 Kings 1:32–35). Adonijah's supporters left him, and Adonijah fled to the altar, fearing that Solomon would put him to death. Solomon let him go to his house with a warning to show himself worthy (1 Kings 1:49–53). Adonijah was later put to death when he tried to usurp the throne by asking to marry one of David's concubines (1 Kings 2:13–25).

After Solomon had become king, God appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask what shall I give you." Solomon's reply reflected his humility and dependence on God. As a young king, Solomon requested an understanding

mind from the Lord (1 Kings 3:5–9). He knew that in order to judge the people according to God’s will, he must be able to discern between good and evil. Only godly wisdom could accomplish that. God was pleased to give Solomon a wise and understanding heart, making him the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kings 3:12).

An example of Solomon’s wisdom is given in the account of the two women who came to Solomon for a verdict. Each woman bore a son, but one baby died. Both women claimed the living baby was hers. Solomon ordered the living baby be cut in half, knowing that the lying woman would not object, but the real mother would. Sure enough, the real mother said to give the baby to the other woman but spare his life, while the lying woman wanted the baby killed. Solomon restored the baby to his true mother, and the people stood in awe of his God-given wisdom (1 Kings 3:16–28).

In addition to wisdom, God promised to give Solomon riches and honor and long life. But long life came with a condition—Solomon was to walk in God’s ways, keeping his commands and statutes as David his father had (1 Kings 3:13–14). God demanded obedience from Solomon, and God demands obedience from us. We have the perfect example in Jesus, who stands as the model of humble obedience to God’s will—obedient to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:3–8).

We serve the same God as the one who abundantly blessed Solomon. And he promises to give us the desires of our hearts as we align our hearts with his (Psalm 37:4).

Historical/Apologetics Background

Have you ever told someone that he or she had the wisdom of Solomon, or have you ever been given that compliment? This is only one of a multitude of phrases in our language drawn from the Bible, and one of several related to Solomon. These phrases, adopted by the world and incorporated into our everyday conversations, illustrate the influence God’s Word has had on the cultures of the past and today.

Solomon’s wisdom was a blessing from God and not the sole product of his own efforts to learn. As such, he was wiser than all of the people of the east and Egypt (1 Kings 4:30). Hearing of the fame of Solomon’s wisdom from the Lord, the queen of Sheba visited him:

Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more breath in her (1 Kings 10:1–5).

The queen blessed the Lord for giving Israel a wise king to execute justice and righteousness. She gave abundant gifts to Solomon, received gifts from Solomon, and returned to her own land.

In 1 Kings 4:29–34, we also learn that Solomon spoke proverbs, wrote many songs, and studied the natural world. God’s gift of wisdom to him was applied to these areas, much of which was recorded in Scripture for our benefit. Solomon’s writings (much of the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and some of the psalms) remain an abundant source of wisdom and instruction. Although Solomon failed to heed much of his own advice, it seems that at the end of his life he had come to understand that chasing after anything but God was to chase a vain thing (see the book of Ecclesiastes). We can learn a valuable lesson from Solomon’s life and seek, by God’s grace, to be doers of the words recorded in Scripture and not just learn about them in a superficial way that, in the end, will only lead to vanity.

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