



The Rise of Solomon **1 Kings 3-4**

Historical Background:

Solomon was the son of David, the second born to him through Bathsheba. David's relationship with Bathsheba did not begin nobly. She was married to another man when David called her to his palace and committed adultery with her. David then had her husband murdered in hopes of covering up his sin, and Bathsheba was silent about the entire affair. Thus, Solomon was the product of this illegal and immoral union.

One might expect that the son of David and Bathsheba would not make a very wise king, given this family background. Yet Solomon became the wisest man who ever lived, and people from all over the world traveled to Jerusalem to learn from him. This demonstrates that wisdom is not based upon one's upbringing or background or even one's resources. Wisdom is available to all people, regardless of their inherent skills or gifts, because it is a gift from God—and it is freely available to anyone who asks for it.

Reading 1 Kings 3:1-28:

The Reign of Solomon: Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba. He was not the eldest son, but he was the man whom God selected to lead His people.

- a. *Married Pharaoh's Daughter:* this political alliance demonstrated how powerful and influential Israel was becoming at the time, since Egypt (a world super-power in its day) did not ordinarily make such alliances. Pharaoh's daughter was the most politically significant of Solomon's seven hundred wives (1 Kings 7:8; 9:16; 11:1). The Lord, however, had expressly forbidden His people to intermarry with the pagan nations (Deut 7), warning them that such marriages would lead the people astray. We will see in later devotionals that this was indeed the result.
- b. *The City of David:* that is, Jerusalem
- c. *The High Places:* The Canaanites worshiped their gods on hilltops, frequently in open-air shrines. The Israelites were commanded to destroy the altars that these pagans built there (Deut 7), and after the temple was completed, God's people were forbidden to use the sites at all. But they didn't listen, and their disobedience eventually led Israel to *syncretism*, the act of combining pagan practices with God's ordained worship.

A Blank Check: The Lord appears to Solomon in a dream and offers to give him anything he desires. Solomon's request may surprise you.

- d. *Solomon Loved the Lord:* Solomon began well, loving the Lord and following his father's example of walking according to God's Word. He sincerely desired to be faithful to the Lord and to be a good king, as David had been for most of his reign.
 - a. *"Except":* This dangerous little word alerts us to Solomon's area of weakness. These "high places," even if they were now dedicated to worship of the Lord, may have been the former sites of Baal worship. At the very least, they were an



example of God's people imitating the ways of the world, worshipping Him at places of convenience rather than in the tabernacle or the temple.

- e. **Gibeon:** a hill approximately six miles northwest of Jerusalem.
- f. **What shall I give you?:** Solomon received a unique offer from the Lord, permitting him to ask for anything he desired. In this, the Lord was also testing Solomon's heart to discover his deepest priorities. In spite of David's onetime adultery, he had been a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). Now here was Solomon's opportunity to demonstrate that he intended to follow his father's footsteps.
- g. **I am a little child?:** Solomon was probably twenty years old when he assumed the throne. His answer to the Lord demonstrated a wholesome humility, as he recognized that it was a huge responsibility to lead the Lord's people. At this point in his life, he acknowledged his own limitations and understood that he could not hope to shepherd Israel under his own power. He needed God's help.
- h. **In the midst of Your people:** Solomon underscored the fact that Israel was the Lord's nation, not his own. He recognized that he was accountable to God for the welfare of His people, and that realization was sobering.
- i. **An understanding heart:** The Hebrew word translated *understanding* literally means "to hear, listen, to obey." Solomon very wisely asked the Lord to give him a listening and obedient heart that was turned fully toward the Word of God.

A Good Choice: Solomon's request pleased the Lord, and He grants wisdom in abundance—along with things that Solomon didn't ask for.

- j. **The speech pleased the Lord:** Christians would do well to imitate Solomon's example, asking the Lord to give them a hunger to understand and obey His Word. A hear for God is a gift from Him; it is not something that a person can attain by sheer willpower. But today, we have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and He is eager to give us this very thing.
- k. **Long life...riches...the life of your enemies:** Requests such as these are more typical of what a person might ask if given such carte blanche by the Lord—yet these things reflect wisdom of the world not the wisdom of God. We will contrast these two types of wisdom throughout our devotionals.
- l. **There has not been anyone like you:** Solomon's great understanding enabled him to write the bulk of what is known as the "Wisdom Literature" (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon).
- m. **I have also given you what you have not asked:** Solomon asked for wisdom and understanding, and the Lord granted his request in superabundance. This is the way God loves to give to His people. As James reminds us, "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" (James 1:5).
- n. **If you walk in My ways:** God gave Solomon great wisdom as an unconditional gift, but He placed conditions on His offer of long life. Unfortunately, as we will see later,



Solomon did not meet those conditions and died before reaching seventy—a relatively young age in Solomon’s day.

Wisdom in Practice: Two prostitutes come to Solomon with a very difficult case. There are no witnesses, and it will require great wisdom to discern the truth.

- o. **Harlots:** IT seems surprising to discover two prostitutes standing before the greatest king of the age, pleading their private cases, but this demonstrates that Solomon made himself available to all types within his kingdom. His wisdom and justice were accessible to all.
- p. **The one says...and the other says:** the difficulty of this case was that there were no witnesses to corroborate one woman’s story over the other—it was a matter of choosing which one to believe, and neither prostitute would have been considered a reliable witness.
- q. **Divide the living child in two:** In great wisdom, Solomon bypassed the conflicting claims of the two women and searched their hearts for the truth. He knew that the child’s real mother would never permit such a horrible fate.

Reading 1 Kings 4:29-34:

Wiser than all Men: God has granted Solomon’s request to such a generous degree that his wisdom is greater than all men of his age.

- r. **Largeness of heart:** The gave Solomon a great capacity for learning and understanding in a breadth of areas, including trees, animals, and fish (v.33)—as well as the things of God. Solomon grew to be a man of immense learning.
- s. **He was wiser than all men:** God has granted Solomon’s request to such a generous degree that his wisdom is greater than all men of his age. The good news for us is that God has not changed—He is just as eager to give wisdom to men and women today as He was in Solomon’s day. All we need to do is ask.

First Impressions:

1. **Why did Solomon ask for wisdom instead of power or wealth or freedom from enemies? Why did God grant his request so generously?**
2. **If God appeared to you in a dream and offered you anything you wanted, what would you ask for?**
3. **Why did God make this amazing offer to Solomon? What does this reveal about His character?**
4. **How did Solomon’s judgment of the two prostitutes demonstrate wisdom?**



Some Key Principles:

- **Wisdom is moral, not merely intellectual.**

When the Bible speaks of wisdom, it is not talking about a person's IQ. From God's perspective, wisdom is a moral quality. The wise person can be a mathematical genius or a scholar of the highest degree and yet still be considered a fool if he does not understand the truths of Scripture. You can be a smart fool, but you cannot be a wise atheist.

Wisdom has nothing to do with a person's inherent intelligence or natural gifts. It is not gained through a good education; neither is it more available to certain social classes or income brackets. Wisdom comes only from God, and it is a gift He gives to those who ask for it. Solomon described wisdom and understanding as "more precious than rubies" (Prov 3:15). Nothing we desire can ever compare with wisdom, "for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver" (v.14). Wisdom can bring long life, riches and great honor, and it enables a person to live a peaceable and pleasant life (v.16-17).

The Word of God contains the words of life, and they are treasure beyond anything the world has to offer. "More to be desired are they than gold," wrote David, "yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Ps 19:10-11).

- **Wisdom comes through God's Word, and He gives it to us freely—if we ask.**

Wisdom is seen in having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). When a person is wise, they see a situation as Christ would see it. This wisdom, of course, only comes through God's Word, and God Himself has promised to give understanding to anyone who will ask for it (James 1:5).

That does not mean that a person is uninvolved in gaining wisdom; it is an active skill, one that requires practice to grow and mature. But wisdom is available to anyone who desire it, and it is a free gift. What's more, it's a gift that God is eager to bestow on all His children, and He's always ready to give more whenever we ask (see James 1:5).

Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom, and He gave it to Him in abundance. Today, God's wisdom does not come in the form of a dream but through the gospel. First Corinthians 1:24 calls Christ "the wisdom of God," and Colossians 3:16 says that this wisdom is gained through the study of "the word of Christ." God is eager to bestow wisdom on us, and that wisdom is found in the pages of Scripture.

- **The more we obey God's Word, the deeper our love grows for Him.**

As a young man, Solomon loved the Lord deeply and wanted to be obedient to His Word. In this, he was like his father, David, who made it a lifelong priority to follow God's law. Unfortunately, Solomon laid a trap for himself early in his kingship by mixing pagan practices into his worship, sacrificing to the Lord on the hilltops where the Canaanites had formerly worshiped the false god Baal.



Over the course of his lifetime, Solomon's love for the Lord grew lukewarm, as we will see in later devotionals. In contrast, David's love for God grew stronger and deeper the longer he walked in obedience. The difference is that David repented of his sinful behaviors, while Solomon continued to excuse them.

When we obey God, we give Him the opportunity to demonstrate His faithfulness, power, and love in our lives. We gain a deeper understanding of His character as we walk in obedience, and this leads to a deeper love for Him. As we will see in the life of Solomon, however, the opposite is also true: if we persist in ignoring His Word, our hearts can grow cold toward God.

Digging Deeper:

1. Define wisdom and understanding in your own words, giving practical examples of each.
2. In what ways are wisdom and understanding more valuable than anything the world can offer?
3. What role does obedience play in gaining wisdom? How are wisdom and obedience inseparably linked?

Taking It Personally:

4. In what areas of your life do you require wisdom at present? Take time right now to ask the Lord to give you wisdom in addressing those issues.
5. What things are most important to you? What are you striving for most actively: success? Wealth? Wisdom? Understanding?