

Solomon's Wisdom

1 Kings 3-7

Key Verse: 3:11-12

“So God said to him, ‘Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.’”

In chapters 1-2 we saw how God established Solomon as king and how God established the kingdom under his reign. Chapters 3-7 are about the early reign of Solomon. It was a great success and the kingdom was blessed because Solomon ruled with the wisdom of God. We all want this kind of success and to be a blessing. It is possible when we have the wisdom of God. There are two kinds of wisdom: worldly wisdom and divine wisdom. Worldly wisdom can be obtained through education, books, experience, or googling the internet. Usually, worldly wisdom makes man proud; sometimes it hurts people. Divine wisdom cannot be gained by human effort. It comes from God. It is life-giving. It helps man to be humble and reveals God's glory. With divine wisdom we can shepherd others, even our children. We can manage a family, a fellowship, a church, a community, even a nation. How can we acquire divine wisdom? Let's learn from Solomon today.

First, Solomon shows his love for the Lord (3:1-4). Look at verse 1. "Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem." At that time, Egypt was a superpower nation. It was very hard to make an alliance with Egypt, and even harder to marry Pharaoh's daughter. But Solomon did both. This means that Israel was recognized as a significant nation in the world. However, Solomon's marriage to a foreign woman was against God's command (Dt 7:3,4). Solomon might have thought that he could handle her, but it was the seed of disaster. Solomon still had humanistic elements in his heart, though he had removed them from his kingdom. A huge dam can be destroyed by a small hole. In the same way, man can fall into disaster through one small element of humanism. So we should not compromise even in small things.

At that time, there was no center for the spiritual life of the people because the temple had not yet been built (2). According to God's command, the Israelites had to make burnt offerings at the place God designated to put his Name (Lev 12:5). This was Jerusalem. But they did not follow this command and were sacrificing at

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the high places. Spiritually speaking, building the temple was most important and urgent for the nation of Israel.

Look at verse 3. "Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places." Though the author does not excuse Solomon for compromising with the high places, in essence Solomon loved the Lord with all his heart and walked in the footsteps of David in obedience to God. Solomon went up to Gibeon, the most important high place, where the tabernacle and altar that Moses had made were still kept (4; 1 Ch 21:29). There, Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on the altar. Solomon spent a lot of money and engaged the help of many people. Solomon did this deliberately at the beginning of his reign. He showed his love for God and sought God's favor and blessing first.

Second, Solomon asks for wisdom (5-9). God was not legalistic toward Solomon. God was moved by Solomon's expression of love for him. In 1 Samuel 2:30b, God had said, "Those who honor me I will honor and those who despise me will be disdained." When Solomon honored God, God wanted to honor him. So he appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (5). God was ready to give Solomon whatever he asked of him. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." God is our loving Father and he wants to bless us. Some people misunderstand God, thinking that he is harsh and demanding. But God is our loving Father who wants to give everything to his children. And though he knows what is best, he still asks us what we want him to do for us. Our problem is that there are so many things to ask. What would you ask for? Someone may say, "Please pay my mortgage." Many people first think of asking for money, believing that they can do all things with money. We can go anywhere in the world with money, except to the kingdom of God. We can buy all things with money, except happiness, righteousness, truth, a happy family, true honor, and good health. What should we ask for as children of God? Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:9-10).

How did Solomon respond? Look at verse 6. Solomon remembered God's grace upon his father David. He knew that he became a king, not because of his own merit, but because of God's grace toward David. Likewise, we receive God's grace through Jesus Christ, who forgave all our sins. So we have to remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must also remember God's grace to us through forefathers. We should realize that God has blessed us through his servants who

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have gone before us. When we recognize God's history, the stream of God's blessing will continue.

Furthermore, Solomon recognized that it was God who made him king. In verse 7a, he said, "Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king...." Solomon recognized God's sovereignty over his life, in contrast to Adonijah. Solomon also recognized his weakness, that he was only a little child who did not know how to carry out his duties (7b). He was humble. God gives grace to the humble (Pr 3:34). Solomon said, "Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number" (8). Solomon respected the people he was called to govern as God's people. He knew that they were not his subjects, but God's subjects, and truly respected their greatness in God. David had the same attitude. When God's people were hiding themselves before Goliath, he did not see them as cowards, but as the army of the living God (1 Sam 17:26). Solomon was aware of God's destiny upon the people of Israel and upon himself. Solomon wanted to lead God's people in a right way to fulfill God's purpose.

Solomon asked, "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (9) Solomon knew that only God could lead the Israelites in the right way. As God's servant, he had a strong sense of responsibility and compassion for them. But he did not know what to do. So he asked for a discerning heart to govern them and to distinguish between right and wrong. Solomon makes a great contrast with Adonijah. Adonijah asked for Abishag the Shunammite to be given to him as his wife (2:17). He wanted to marry first, and his motive was not pure. He was killed. But Solomon asked for a discerning heart to govern his people well.

Solomon knew that to distinguish between right and wrong is very important in establishing a lasting kingdom. Yet it is not easy. There are so many criteria to consider. Every generation has its own standard of what is right and wrong. In the eighteenth century, people valued human reason. But human reason cannot be the criteria to distinguish right and wrong. In the nineteenth century, people thought that science was the answer. They expected a utopia without diseases or death or destruction through scientific advancement. But this turned out to be a rosie dream without roots in reality. In our times, postmodern thought denies that there is any absolute right or wrong. Anything can be right and good, in some aspect, even serial killers, homosexuals or adulterers, or tyrants. In this postmodern era people say good is evil and evil is good. When we hear the words, "wicked," or "sick" used by young people we hardly know what it means. We all need wisdom to

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discern what is right and wrong. Where can we find this wisdom? Only God's word gives us the absolute truth about what is right and wrong.

When God created the garden of Eden he commanded man very clearly, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen 2:16,17). To obey God's command was good. To disobey God's command was evil. God set the standard of good and evil. But the serpent deceived man saying, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4,5). The woman was deceived by the serpent and disobeyed God. Then mankind lost the absolute criteria with which to judge good and evil and began to develop his own standard. Man has been in confusion ever since. St. Augustine had an agony about the existence of evil. The Lord God created the world good. Then how did evil come into being? Through his deep meditation he realized that leaving God, who is absolutely good, is evil. Evil is the absence of God. In other words, to be close to God is good and to be away from God is evil because God is the standard of good. That is why the book of kings judges each one as good or evil "in the eyes of the Lord" (1 Ki 14:8; 15:5,11,26). When we obey God's word, that is good. When we disobey his word and go away from God, that is evil. Solomon wanted to follow God's standard of good and evil. He acknowledged that the Lord God is the only judge between right and wrong. So we must seek God first. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." True wisdom and understanding come from God. When we love and obey the Lord from our hearts, God will be pleased and grant us wisdom and understanding. Then we will prosper in all we do. However, if we do not love and obey the Lord, we become fools, though we claim to be wise (Ro 1:21).

We have many things to ask from the Lord such as long life, wealth and the destruction of enemies. These days many people pray for a good job and an improved economy. Many pray for a suitable marriage partner. Those who pray are much better than those who just look around and hope something will happen. Some pray for good health. We need these things. However, we must first ask for what God wants us to have. God really wants to give us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom (Eph 1:17). Jesus said in Luke 11:13, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" God is very eager to give us the Holy Spirit. When God gives the Holy Spirit he gives us sparkling wisdom by which we can help God's flock in the best way. Sometimes, though we eagerly desire to raise disciples, we lack wisdom to help them. James 1:5 says, "If any of

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you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." God does not rebuke us, but gives us wisdom by his grace.

Third, God gives Solomon wisdom (10-15). How did God respond to Solomon's prayer? Look at verse 10. "The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this." Let's read verses 11-12. "So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.'" Moreover God wanted to give him what he had not asked for: both riches and honor. As long as he walked in God's ways and obeyed God's commands, God would also give him a long life. Here we learn two things.

In the first place, there is prayer that pleases God. This prayer is according to God's will. 1 John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence that we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." When we pray according to God's will he hears and answers. Sometimes we do not receive because we do not ask. Sometimes we ask but do not receive because we ask with wrong motives, that we may spend what we get on our pleasures (Jam 4:2b,3). George Mueller received God's answer to his prayer 50,000 times. He said the secret of receiving God's answer was a pure motive. Prayer should not be selfish, but according to God's will. Then God surely answers our prayer. We must ask according to God's will.

In the second place, God answers our prayer more abundantly than we ask. God is our Father. When we really ask according to his will, he provides everything generously according to our need. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When our prayer pleases God, God will give us all these things as well. Solomon had asked for a discerning heart to govern God's people. God gave him that and more. God gave him riches, honor, and a promise of long life if he kept God's commands. If children love and please their father, their father wants to give them everything they want, as long as it is good for them. But if a child does not care about his father and just wants to use his father for selfish gain, the father gives only what the child asks, and no more. When we please God and love God, God will give us everything we need.

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Look at verse 15a. "Then Solomon awoke--and he realized it had been a dream." Though it was a dream, it was the expression of Solomon's deep desire from his heart. God accepted Solomon's prayer and God began to answer his prayer. Look at verse 15b. "He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court." When the king was right with God and his prayer was answered, the kingdom rejoiced.

II. Solomon, a wise king (3:16-4:28)

First, Solomon's wise judgment (3:16-28). The wisdom that Solomon received from the Lord was well revealed through his judgments for his people. One day two prostitutes came before the king. Solomon was humble and willing to receive any kind of person who wanted to come to him. These two prostitutes lived together and had sons at the same time. One night, due to a bad sleeping habit, one mother rolled over on her baby and he died. She exchanged her dead baby with the other woman's living baby. But the mother of the living baby realized what had happened and they began to argue. These days we could easily find out whose son it was by DNA testing. But in those days it was one prostitute's word against another, and it seemed impossible to distinguish between the claims of the two women. It was a test case for the king, to see if he could give a right judgment and show himself to be a wise king.

Solomon said, "Bring me a sword." So people thought that both prostitutes might be killed. But Solomon gave this order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other" (25). The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" The real mother had compassion on her son and gave up her right to have him in order to save his life. The other woman revealed her envy and cold heart. Solomon discerned good and evil and made a right verdict. Solomon knew a mother's heart.

True wisdom is the ability to see through to the essence of a matter. These days there are many people who say they are okay and doing well. But the Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. No matter who he or she may be, each person has a sin problem that is destroying their lives, causing great misery which will lead to God's judgment and eternal condemnation. Each person needs the forgiveness of sins and the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts to solve their sin problem and to find true freedom and peace. So we must see people with

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the wisdom of God and with gospel faith. Then we can truly help them. It is easy to judge them based on their appearance or wealth or honorable position or seemingly good moral life. But we should see through these things. Each person needs the gospel and must repent before God and receive the grace of salvation. When we see through God's eyes and with God's word, when we have God's mind, we can make a right judgment and help people in a right way.

Second, Solomon's wise administration (4:1-19). In governing one's country, to choose the right people is most important. Solomon chose God-fearing people and put them in the right places. In King David's time, it was a time of war, so the military general was the top person listed in his cabinet. But in Solomon's time, it was a time of peace. So a priest was the top man in his cabinet (2 Sam 8:15-18; 2 Sam 20:23-26). Solomon embraced Abiathar the priest, though he had dismissed him from service. Also, two of Nathan's sons were in Solomon's cabinet. Solomon had two secretaries, one more than King David. In verses 8-19 Solomon appointed twelve district governors in order to rule his people in an effective way.

Verses 20-28 show the wealth and prosperity of Israel under the rule of Solomon. Verse 20 says, "The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy." Solomon's kingdom was prosperous economically, in military power, in foreign affairs and in all areas. So people were happy. They lived in safety and enjoyed peace and prosperity. When a ruler has God's wisdom, people under him can enjoy peace and wealth. May President Obama ask God for wisdom.

In verses 29-34, we learn that God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man and his fame spread over all the earth. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He had deep knowledge of plants and animals and birds and reptiles and fish. Many kings came to listen to his wisdom. His wisdom came from God. Those who receive God's wisdom are far beyond all other men.

III. Solomon builds the temple (5:1-7:51)

The temple which was built by Solomon was the first of several temple buildings which were constructed in Jerusalem. It was built according to the pattern of the tabernacle which God gave Moses through a detailed set of instructions. God had shown the pattern to Moses while on the mountain (Ex 26:30). So in fact,

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Solomon's temple was built according to God's wisdom. David had a great desire to build the temple of the Lord. But the Lord would not allow him to do so because he was a man of blood. God ordained Solomon to build the temple for him (1 Chr 22:9,10). The temple was God's dwelling place. God wanted people to come there to worship God, repenting of their sins and sacrificing to the Lord. It was the center of Israel's spiritual life. It was very important to build the temple of God. Before the temple was built, there was no central place to worship God according to his law. So they worshiped God in their own way on the high places. Solomon knew the meaning of the temple. So he built it according to God's wisdom.

First, Solomon prepares to build the temple (5:1-18). Building the temple was a huge job. So they needed to prepare materials and technicians and laborers. In verses 1-5 Solomon sent his people to Hiram king of Tyre and explained his purpose of building the temple. He emphasized that the building of the temple was God's will. It was the right time to build it. So he asked the help of Hiram with great respect, requesting cedars of Lebanon and workers to bring them. When Solomon requested this from Hiram gently and humbly, he was greatly pleased and said, "Praise be to the Lord today, for he has given David a wise son to rule over this great nation" (7). So Solomon received a lot of help from Hiram. The important material in building the temple, which was cedar, was in Hiram's territory of Lebanon. According to 7:13-15 the most skillful craftsmen were also in Tyre. So having a good relationship with Hiram was very important in building the temple. Solomon knew that and he made a good relationship with Hiram. He won the person and then the material. In doing the work of God it is important to win the hearts of others. In doing great work of God, no one can do it all by himself. We need wisdom to work together with the right people who are essential in God's work. So after making a treaty with Hiram, Solomon conscripted laborers from all Israel, 30,000 men. He sent them off to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand at a time, so that the laborers could spend one month at work in Lebanon and then have two months at home. That is also wisdom. Those who are in positions of leadership can learn from him that we should win people's hearts in doing the work of God, not just prepare materials and then drive people in a task oriented manner.

Second, Solomon builds the temple (6:1-38). Look at verse 1. "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord." The second month was April or May and it was about 966 B.C. The temple was completed after seven years in 959 B.C. (6:38). Verses 2-10 show the outward construction of the temple. Verses 14-36 show the inside construction of the temple. In verse 7, in building the temple, there

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was no hammer or chisel or any other iron tool used at the construction site. Construction work went on quietly. It was because the temple was the place of God's presence. Even in building the temple there should be quietness.

Look at verses 11-13. "The word of the Lord came to Solomon: 'As for the temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, carry out my regulations and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel.'" The Lord's word came to Solomon in the midst of building the temple. It was to teach Solomon the purpose of the temple once more. Building the temple was not just building the physical temple of God. The important thing was to love God and obey his commands. The Lord didn't want Solomon to finish his obligation to the Lord by building the temple. Rather, he wanted him to follow his decrees and carry out his revelation and keep all his commands and obey them. Then the Lord would dwell among them and not abandon them. The temple itself was not a guarantee that God would dwell among them. God would dwell among them when they obeyed his word.

Look at verses 37-38. "The foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid in the fourth year, in the month of Ziv. In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it." The temple had several characteristics. In the first place, the inner part of the temple was all covered with pure gold. Here pure gold refers to light and purity. It reveals that God is light and he is pure. Pure gold also means unchanging character and nobility. It means that God is never changing and he is the most noble. It also shows that the relationship between God and his people never changes. So the temple covered with pure gold is compared to the kingdom of God which never changes and is filled with God's glory.

In the second place, on the wall of the temple there were cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers (32). The covered cherubim in the temple show that angels protect God's glory. Palm trees refer to life and open flowers refer to fullness of life. That means that God is the source of life and the temple is the place of God's life.

In the third place, the entrance door of the Most Holy Place was smaller than the door to the entrance of the temple. In the Most Holy Place there was the ark of the covenant, which refers to God's presence. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place once a year. The narrow door to the Most Holy Place reveals that God

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is separate from man as the Creator and he is the Holy One whom man cannot approach in his own way.

Third, Solomon's palace and the temple's furnishings (7:1-51). In verses 1-12, Solomon built the palace, taking 13 years. He built a throne hall and a Hall of Justice in his palace. It shows his desire to judge his people in a right way. Verses 13-51 show the detailed descriptions of the temple furnishings. Solomon invited the most skillful craftsmen to build the furnishings of the temple. Look at verse 51. "When all the work King Solomon had done for the temple of the Lord was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated--the silver and gold and the furnishings--and he placed them in the treasuries of the Lord's temple."

What was the meaning of Solomon's finishing building the temple? Firstly, the one and only altar where all the Israelites came to worship had been made. In the past, when there was no temple, many people offered their sacrifices on high places in their own way. Although the Lord accepted their sacrifices, it was not the right way to offer them. Now, since the temple was built, the Israelites could offer sacrifices in the right way. In this way, the priestly nation, where God ruled as king had been prepared. Secondly, the building of the temple was done by the hands of Israelites and Gentiles. It means that God is not only the God of Israel but the God of Gentiles. Thirdly, the building of the temple was done according to Solomon's wisdom. When the tabernacle was built God showed all the details to Moses. God did not teach Solomon how to build the temple. But Solomon built the temple beautifully, understanding its meaning. He built the temple with all the wisdom God gave him. He used the wisdom, not for his selfish purpose, but for the glory of God. It was the fruit of his love and fear of the Lord.

Solomon was a man of wisdom. He had wisdom to distinguish between right and wrong in order to serve God's flock. His wisdom was given by God when he asked. Also, his wisdom came from his deep desire for loving God and showing his glory. If we really love the Lord and God's flock from our hearts, we must ask God's wisdom to serve them. Then God will surely give us wisdom.