

Lesson 9 | July 30, 2023

Solomon's Wisdom

Study Text: 1 Kings 3:1–28; 2 Chronicles 1:1–17

Central Truth: The pursuit of godly wisdom invites God's favor.

Key Verse: 1 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 (KJV).

“Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine God's gift of wisdom to Solomon and how Solomon utilized that gift.
- Students will appreciate why biblical wisdom is a worthy pursuit for every Christian.
- Students will commit to seeking God-given wisdom, then live a wise life in humble submission to God.

Introducing the Study

Say: The Christian life is characterized by growth— forward movement in the will and the ways of the Lord. Such growth is impossible in our own strength. We need help and enablement from Him. Today's lesson focuses on a gift God offers freely, although many people fail to ask for or live within its blessings.

Opening Activity—I Wish

Ask. If you could wish for one thing in your life, what would it be? Answers could include time, money, or friends, though we might easily mention spiritual blessings such as peace, strength, or faith.

Say: It is easy to spend time daydreaming about an object or skill you wish you had. While it can be fun to think about money or possessions, many times we wish we could have something even more valuable that would help us be better parents, friends, or employees. Today's lesson helps us put our “wishes” into perspective. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The story of Solomon's reign begins with a very important statement: “Solomon son of David took firm control of his kingdom, for the Lord his God was with him and made him very powerful” (2 Chronicles 1:1, NLT). In King Solomon, we find an excellent example of how one's life is impacted in tangible ways by the presence of God as that person seeks God, then surrenders to His will. According to 1 Kings 10:23–24, Solomon was richer than any other king on the earth, and people all over the world wanted to meet him. Yet

Solomon recognized that wealth and fame were not enough. He desired a much greater gift from God

Part 1—Solomon Asks for Wisdom Understanding to Know Right from Wrong

1 Kings 3:1–9

Say: This passage begins with a description of Solomon’s relationship with God at the outset of his reign. From this we gain insight into what led up to Solomon’s important request. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At this time in his life, Solomon was careful and devout in his love for the Lord (1 Kings 3:3), which compelled him to follow God’s commands. Indeed, loving God and acting upon that love with obedience is a strong theme in the Old Testament when a person seeks to honor God (see Deuteronomy 11:1,13; Micah 6:8). It is important to point out that the love noted here describes something far more than just affection. (In fact, it is the same use of the word for “love” that describes intimate relationships in the Old Testament.) Such love encompasses commitment and moral concern, which includes behavior that honors and upholds the relationship.

What follows in 1 Kings 3:5–9, then, is not entirely surprising. Solomon had just offered sacrifices to God. In a dream, God told Solomon that He would grant Solomon whatever he asked for. Certainly, we might expect a new king to ask for military success or prosperity for the nation. But Solomon recalled the many times God had come to the aid of his father—both through loving acts during David’s reign and faithfulness to preserve and continue the kingly line in Solomon (verses 6–7). Note the link between faithfulness in David and God’s faithful love. David was far from perfect through the course of his life, but he loved the Lord and sought to serve Him to the point that God set him apart as a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

Solomon also recognized his own shortcomings. He was a young man with little experience (1 Kings 3:7), yet he was responsible to lead a great nation. So Solomon asked God for what he needed, rather than what he wanted: “Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong” (verse 9, NLT; emphasis added). These three points of emphasis must be seen together, for they describe well the term wisdom in the biblical sense as it is identified in verse 12. (1) The phrase translated “understanding heart” literally refers to a “hearing mind” and uses the same word that begins the Jewish Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, where the word is translated, “Hear!” (KJV). One might compare it to a parent saying, “Hear me” or “Listen to me.” It implies more than just physical hearing. It is a spiritual understanding rooted in God’s commands that guides one’s life properly. (2) “Govern” speaks to the practical nature of Solomon’s responsibilities. He would need to oversee the nation’s daily needs, settle disputes between citizens, and protect the nation from enemies. Solomon recognized he needed God’s help in these practical matters. (3)

“Know[ing] the difference between right and wrong” was indispensable for Solomon, encompassing both the practical and the spiritual. Israel’s security hinged upon their right relationship with God, and Solomon himself would only remain in close relationship with God if he lived out such obedience.

Resource Packet Item 1: Insight and Discernment

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it individually or as a group. Emphasize how God-given, Scripture-based insight will have a powerful impact upon the way they live.

Discuss

- ? What does it mean to “love God,” and how is a person’s life changed by loving God?
- ? How does a Christian today discern the difference between right and wrong?

Wisdom and Knowledge

2 Chronicles 1:1–10

Say: This passage parallels 1 Kings 3:1–9 with one key clarification: Here we find a direct mention of a significant word found throughout Scripture: *wisdom*. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is important to recognize that 2 Chronicles was written centuries after 1 Kings as the people returned from the Babylonian Exile to find a city, wall, and temple in desperate need of repair. Thus, its words focus strongly on God’s covenant faithfulness to His people throughout their history—reminding the people that this faithful God would again restore them. Note a slight difference in the wording of the request between 1 Kings 3:9, where Solomon asks for understanding (the Hebrew word *shema*), and 2 Chronicles 1:10, which records Solomon asking for wisdom. Looking back at the history of God’s people, the chronicler notes that Solomon was indeed seeking that great gift of godly wisdom—which speaks to the abiding hand of God upon Israel as they lived as His people in an evil and tumultuous world.

Resource Packet Item 2: Wisdom

Distribute the information sheet and discuss its content as a class. Encourage students to read it at home, completing the personal reflection question and pondering ways in which biblical wisdom can be at work in their lives.

Note how wisdom is viewed in the Old Testament. It is central to the Book of Ecclesiastes, as Solomon (the teacher) seeks out meaning and purpose to life (Ecclesiastes 1:13,16–18; 7:12,19,23). Proverbs provides wide-ranging instruction on wisdom: God is the source of true wisdom (Proverbs 2:6); it is worth seeking (3:13); it is closely linked to godly living (4:11); and the fear of the Lord instructs us in wisdom (15:33).

Wisdom can refer to a practical skill (Exodus 31:6, KJV), but it is usually more focused on intellect and character. Wise men and women understand the nature of the times in which they live. They are able to discern what is happening around them as well as the proper way to respond (2 Chronicles 2:12–14; 8:1–6; note the practical setting). Solomon’s decision-making exemplified Deuteronomy 4:6. God-given wisdom is fundamental to a life devoted to serving Him. In the end, spiritual wisdom leads to spiritual growth, which directs our paths to an everlasting inheritance (Ephesians 1:15–18).

Discuss

? What are some practical ways that spiritual discernment will make a difference in your life?

? In what specific ways can you grow in God-given wisdom?

Part 2—God Gives Wisdom and More

Wisdom to Prosper in His God-Given Role

2 Chronicles 1:11–17

Say: The passages we will consider next form a suitable pair, showing us the impact of God-given wisdom. First, in 2 Chronicles 1:11–17, Solomon was blessed in tangible ways—blessings that would help him serve as king of a great nation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God’s response to Solomon’s request for wisdom tells us much about His relationship with His people—including us. As a new king, Solomon had many valid needs. And he naturally desired for his nation to prosper. God’s answer to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 1:11–13 demonstrated that He does, in fact, often give His people above and beyond what they ask or even imagine (see Ephesians 3:20). Because Solomon wanted to help his people (2 Chronicles 1:10–11), God made Solomon and the nation rich beyond their comprehension. There were practical benefits to such wealth: It brought security to the people by providing for strong defenses, and it testified to the surrounding nations of the greatness of their God (see 2 Chronicles 9:1–12).

A description of the forces Solomon accrued through his wealth is included in 2 Chronicles 1:14. The “chariot cities” have been identified as Hazor in the far north, Megiddo in the fertile Jezreel Valley south of Mt. Carmel in the land of Manasseh, and Gezer in the lowland area west of Jerusalem in the Judean foothills. Each of these cities was extremely well-fortified and occupied a strategic area, bringing great security to the nation.

Verses 15–17 chronicle the great wealth Solomon accrued. The terrain around Jerusalem is rocky and provided a ready image to illustrate the abundance of gold and silver. Cedar was rare and needed to be imported (often from Lebanon), so a plentiful supply indicated great wealth.

Verses 16–17 especially highlight Solomon’s wise utilization of Israel’s strategic location. As a land bridge between the great kingdoms of Africa, Asia, and Europe, the nation was strongly positioned for trade and taxation. Horses from Egypt were prized, and Solomon was able to amass large numbers of them for trade using the rich pastureland of the region.

It is important to grasp what these verses tell us beyond specific information about gold, silver, and horses. God had given Solomon great practical wisdom to amass wealth, which in turn blessed the nation of Israel and enabled it to become an important entity in the region. In short, God used the gift of wisdom to enable His people to bring Him glory and further His plans.

Discuss

? What are some ways godly wisdom has equipped you to fulfill God’s calling on your life?

? What are the risks of not seeking wisdom as you make key decisions?

Wisdom to Respond in Worship

1 Kings 3:10–15

Say: The outpouring of God’s blessings in response to Solomon’s request for wisdom prompted him to worship God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God’s response to Solomon was accompanied by a sobering command. We see in 1 Kings 3:10–14 that God was pleased with Solomon’s choice of a request. It reflected thoughtfulness and humility on Solomon’s part. And God did, in fact, provide wisdom and understanding to govern “with justice” (verse 11, NLT). While this refers to a temporal ability to discern a just outcome in hard situations, it also carries a religious meaning. As good as wise Solomon’s judgment might be, he would need to continually seek God’s direction, not simply rely on his own understanding.

Furthermore, the blessing of a long life was contingent upon seeking and obeying God (verse 14). God’s blessings always exist within a relationship: We are His people and He is our God. Thus, the health of that relationship impacts the reality of His blessings.

Solomon awakened, realizing God had granted his request by way of a dream (verse 15). He immediately sought out a place of worship and offered both burnt offerings and peace offerings. The former were gifts given wholly to God. The latter also provided a sacred meal for the king’s servants. In doing this, Solomon recognized God as the giver and sought the blessings of peace—health and prosperity in this setting—that could only come from God. Solomon provides a great example of worship that honors God and recognizes Him as our source.

Discuss

? Examine the emphasis you place on both blessing and obedience. Is your emphasis balanced? How might you grow in your commitment to obedience?

? What are some ways we honor and worship God for His blessings today?

Part 3—God-Given Wisdom on Display

A Situation that Demanded Discernment

1 Kings 3:16–22

Say: Have you ever been in what seemed like a “no win” situation? Neither course of action was clearly correct, and the consequences were serious. Solomon quickly faced such a choice. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Solomon’s God-given ability to rightly govern the people was put to the test in 1 Kings 3:16–22. Two prostitutes claimed motherhood over the same baby, and no witnesses could attest to the truth. In this tragic situation, one woman had already lost a son, and the other was in danger of losing hers as well.

The fact that the women were prostitutes is important to the story, because it demonstrated that Solomon would act on behalf of the lowest members of society. Indeed, the Scripture itself does not speak to the morality of the situation, even though engaging in prostitution was a sin. This was an issue of justice, which the lowest class of Israel’s citizens deserved just as much as the highest class. Solomon would have to pass judgment on a case that seemed impossible to rightly discern. How could he be sure which woman was truly the child’s mother?

Discuss

? What does this story tell us about God’s justice?

? What factors might tend to cloud a person’s judgment today, and how can we be sure that we act justly to all people?

A Wise and Just Solution

1 Kings 3:23–28

Say: At first reading, the climax of the 1 Kings 3 story can seem shocking, almost bizarre. We must give it a “big picture” look to understand what is happening in verses 23–28. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After restating the issue, Solomon called for a sword (and by implication, a professional swordsman). Then he made a startling command: “Cut the living child in two, and give half to one woman and half to the other!” (1 Kings 3:25, NLT). In his godly wisdom, Solomon knew the true mother would identify herself. And indeed, that is exactly what happened.

Verse 26 presents the conclusion of the matter when the actual mother immediately offered to give up the child to save his life. The other woman—perhaps motivated by grief, bitterness, or even cruelty—called for the child to be killed so neither woman would have a son. Solomon decreed that the child be returned to his true mother.

This amazing resolution solidified the people's admiration for the king (verse 28). God's wisdom worked in and through Solomon. And God will also give us empowerment and direction as we serve Him. We would do well to seek His wisdom for our own lives today.

Discuss

? Recount a time when God gave you wisdom in a tough situation.

? How do you think wisdom and direction from the Lord changed the outcome of your situation?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Resource Packet Item 3: What Is Wisdom?

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it individually. Discuss each Scripture and their responses as time allows. You might also invite students to use these Scriptures in their devotions this week, praying that God will help them grow in His wisdom as they make decisions each day.

Say: It has been said that wisdom means cultivating a particular way of thinking—God's way—and then living accordingly. Wisdom is the means by which we properly apply God's Word to our actions and decisions each day. This lesson applauds Solomon for asking God to give him wisdom rather than anything else, and God continues to offer wisdom to all who ask for it today (James 1:5). This week, cultivate the habit of regularly asking God for wisdom.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Encourage someone who is struggling to find God's plan for their life, reminding them that He will bring direction and empowerment as we seek Him.
- Take time to list the opportunities and abilities God has given you, then pray for ways to utilize them to minister to others.
- Pray that God will help you grow in wisdom so that you may live wisely and be a blessing to friends, family, neighbors, and even strangers.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Wisdom for Crafting.
Exodus 28:1–5

Tuesday:

Solomon's Wisdom Described.

1 Kings 4:29–34

Wednesday:

The Beginning of Wisdom.

Psalm 111:1–10

Thursday:

Someone Wiser than Solomon.

Matthew 12:38–42

Friday:

A “Foolish” Message Offers Salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Saturday:

Christ: Wisdom from God.

1 Corinthians 1:26–31