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**"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?" (I Kings 3:9).**

## **Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom**

**Lesson Subject:** God is the source of true wisdom.

**L27. Date:** June 1984. **Text:** I Kings 3:5-14. **Topic.** Solomon: Prayers of; Wisdom: Prayed for.

Why would a study of Proverbs begin with a study of I Kings 3:5-15? Because that text is a key to a full appreciation of the "wisdom literature" to be found in Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs carries the title, *"the proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel"* (Proverbs 1: 1). It is wise to meet the author before reviewing the book. First Kings 3:5-13 explains the unusual wisdom of King Solomon.

Solomon is famous for his personal wisdom. *"He spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five"* (I Kings 4:32). His wisdom did not come from innate ability or developed skill, but from God.

The apostle James wrote, *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"* (James 1:5). That truth is illustrated in King Solomon who prayed, *"Give. . . thy servant an understanding heart"* (I Kings 3:9), and received God's answer, *"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"* (I Kings 3:12). With such an endowment, no wonder Solomon was known for his great wisdom.

Solomon's prayer for wisdom remains to challenge men today. Harry Truman read it upon his inauguration as president of the United States of America; then he asked God for wisdom.

## I. THE NEED FOR WISDOM

God is the source of all true wisdom. It is from His infinite wisdom that man's limited wisdom flows. Each person needs God's gift to be truly wise.

**A. Family problems require wisdom from God.** Solomon's paternity was less than ideal. His father and mother (David and Bathsheba) began their relationship in an adulterous affair which brought death to the child conceived in adultery (II Samuel 11, 12). His opponents must have used that in gossip about him. It is a sign of God's grace that He forgave David and Bathsheba and blessed their marriage union afterwards. David's commitment to God and God's blessing on Solomon prove the truth of Proverbs 20:7, *"The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him."* Solomon needed the wisdom of God that he might rule wisely in spite of a bad family background.

**B. Human opposition requires wisdom.** Solomon's right to rule over Israel was contested by his half-brother Adonijah (I Kings 1:5-53). After the original effort was thwarted and Solomon was established on the throne, political plots continued in behalf of Adonijah (I Kings 2:13-46). How can a man hold the place and do the work of God's assignment when he is continually opposed by other men? Let him trust God for wisdom.

**C. Professional obligations require wisdom** (I Kings 3:1). Solomon entered various political alliances with rulers about him, but he felt unqualified to deal with all the affairs of ruling over a kingdom of people whom God had called His own. He prayed, *"I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen. . . . 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?"* (I Kings 3:7-9). Solomon wanted to rule God's people as a faithful servant who did his Lord's will.

**D. Religious conditions require wisdom** (I Kings 3:2, 3). There was no central place of worship. The people worshiped God on the tops of hills. *"Solomon loved the LORD"* (verse 3). He wanted to lead the people in religious truth.

Those same conditions which faced Solomon about one thousand years before Christ are present today. Family problems, human opposition, professional obligations, and religious apostasy call for divine wisdom. Let the people of God pray as Solomon did, *"Give. . . thy servant(s) an understanding heart. "*

## II. THE OFFER OF WISDOM

**A. God gives wisdom to those who are pure in heart** (I Kings 3:3). *"Solomon loved the LORD. . . : he sacrificed and burnt incense"* (verse 3). His faithful performance of religious rituals indicated that he had a heart which sought God.

David and Bathsheba named their son *"Solomon,"* but the prophet Nathan was commissioned of God to name him *"Jedidiah"* ("beloved of the Lord"). Solomon bore a special relationship with God. Religion was more than ritual to him. He was one of the *"pure in heart"* who knew the reality of God (Matthew 5:8). He knew God's requirement to *"fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul"* (Deuteronomy 10:12).

**B. God gives wisdom to one who is active in religious duties** (verses 3, 4). The *"high places"* were condemned in Numbers 33:52 and I Kings 13:32, but they were the only places Israel had to worship. They were places of approved worship of God in Genesis 22:2; 31:54; Judges 6:26. God was not so concerned with the place as with the spirit of Solomon's worship. Solomon went to the *"great high place"* at Gibeon to worship God. There he prayed the blessed prayer for wisdom. God answered the prayer.

**C. God gives wisdom as a free gift of grace** (verse 5). Solomon did not deserve God's answer to prayer; however, God appeared there to bless him (Genesis 12:7; 17:1; 18:1), to direct him (Genesis 26:2; 39:9f.), and to commission him (Exodus 3:16; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1).

God's offer of wisdom still stands (James 1:5). If you are pure in heart, faithful in religious living, and dependent on God's grace, you can ask and receive!

## III. THE REQUEST FOR WISDOM

**A. Every request for wisdom must be dependent on the mercy of God** (verse 6). Solomon's family was an illustration of God's mercy. God rejected King Saul because of his sin, but forgave King David after he had sinned. Solomon knew he did not deserve to be king; he spoke of God showing *"great mercy"* to David *"that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day"* (verse 6). No man can lay claim to a blessing of God based on personal merit, but always on divine grace.

**B. Every request for wisdom must recognize the inability of man**

(verse 7). Solomon confessed to God, *"I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in."* Great men of God are always conscious of their limitations. Daniel the prophet recognized this truth and prayed, *"I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom"* (Daniel 2:23). He confessed before King Nebuchadnezzar, *"There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets. . . . This secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have"* (Daniel 2:28, 30). God's strength is revealed in our weakness.

**C. Every request for wisdom must be based on a sense of divine commission.** King Solomon saw himself responsible before God for the direction of the nation of Israel (verse 8). That nation was God's treasure (Exodus 19:5), His flock (Psalm 78:52), His prepared people (Luke 1:17), His delight (Deuteronomy 26:19), and His chosen people (I Chronicles 16:13). What a responsibility rested on the king! When one feels an obligation before God, he will appeal for the wisdom of God.

**D. Every request for wisdom must be based on the desire to serve God faithfully** (verse 9). Solomon felt, *"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding"* (Proverbs 4:7). To ask for wealth or fame would have been to ask for oneself. To ask for wisdom to serve was to ask for the glory of God and the good of His people.

What does that teach you? It teaches that you can ask for wisdom if your heart is right with God and your motive is pure before Him. You can ask if you are concerned for the glory of God and the good of people in your asking. You can ask and receive.

#### IV. THE GIFT OF WISDOM

**A. The gift of wisdom is the expression of God's pleasure** (verses 10, 11). *"God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy"* (Ecclesiastes 2:26). Blessed is the man who prays when his *"ways please the LORD"* (Proverbs 16:7). That man will receive what he asks.

**B. The gift of wisdom is an accomplished fact.** Solomon did not have to wait for God to answer his prayer. *"I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart"* (verse 12). The Lord answered Solomon's prayer before he offered it. It was a wise and understanding heart which prompted him to pray as he did. God promised, *"He shall call upon me, and I will*

*answer him"* (Psalm 91:15). That promise continues to be valid even today! Thank God for answered prayer.

**C. The gift of wisdom is accompanied by an even greater blessing** (verses 13, 14). Solomon asked for wisdom and God gave it: then God gave him riches (I Chronicles 29:12; Ecclesiastes 5:19), honor (Psalm 91:15; John 12:26), and a long life (Psalm 91:16; Proverbs 10:27). So great was the glory which God gave to Solomon in his kingdom that the queen of Sheba testified, *"It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard"* (I Kings 10:6, 7). God gives full measure!

## V. THE EXPRESSION OF WISDOM

**A. Wisdom causes one to believe God** (verse 15). Solomon awoke to discover that he had dreamed that God made a promise to him. It would be easy to discount a dream, but Solomon accepted God's word in the dream and trusted God to do as He had promised. He did not make the mistake of confining God to one way of speaking.

**B. Wisdom causes one to worship God.** Solomon returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. The burnt offerings were wholly consumed by fire to indicate his entire dedication to the will of God. The peace offerings were for thanksgiving and to show love to God. Worship is an appropriate response to God's promises to supply one's need; it is always a sign of wisdom.

**C. Wisdom causes one to witness to others.** Solomon made a great feast for all his attendants and associates. He must have explained to them the cause of the celebration; so, he witnessed to them of God's promise in grace. *"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul"* (Psalm 66:16).

Blessed is the person who has wisdom which prompts him to worship, trust, and witness of the Lord God. Do you possess that kind of wisdom?

God delights to answer prayer. He will answer your prayer for wisdom to live and serve Him well. *"The LORD giveth wisdom"* (Proverbs 2:6). *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"* (James 1:5). *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened*

*unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7, 8).*

## QUESTIONS

1. What is wisdom?
2. Why did Solomon go to God for wisdom?
3. What are the requirements for answered prayer?
4. What does James 1:5 mean to you?
5. What does Daniel 2:23 teach you?
6. How does Proverbs 4:7 apply to you?
7. How does the gift of wisdom show in one's life?
8. Why does wisdom cause a person to worship God?
9. How does wisdom produce a witness for God?
10. In what areas do you need God's wisdom today?