

## **Solomon's Wisdom**

### **1 Kings 3:1-5:18**

In the opening chapters of Kings, we saw how Solomon's reign was established. The right king was appointed to the throne, even though some questionable actions were taken. In chapter 3, we see more about the leadership of Solomon, some positive and negative acts, and we are told of the reason of Solomon's greatness: God gave him wisdom.

To help us think about the importance of wisdom, let us think about a few questions. What type of person is worth admiring? Or, how do you evaluate someone's significance? For many young ladies (and some older ladies), outer appearance is the determining factor of value and worth. It is evidenced in films, magazines, songs, and many other contexts. Problems arise with this quest for a perfect appearance, like eating disorders and addictions to plastic surgery. I read this week of a young model who was "leaving her career for God" citing that she didn't want to use her body to promote sex. She described the sad scene of her modeling world: teenage girls getting in black SUV's late at night, getting home early in the morning, standing in front of the mirror sobbing because they thought they "were fat," and one being so bulimic that she involuntarily threw up everything she ate. For these young ladies, everything sadly revolves around one's figure. I also heard of one pop star who said that her greatest fear when she turns seventy is that she would no longer be "hot." Being "hot" is the central desire not only for her, but the many girls who seek to emulate her.

But the book of Proverbs gives a different vision of what ladies should desire: "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." (Prov 31:30). That lady is worth emulating. Not fearing the Lord is what you should be concerned with, not "not being hot." Fearing the Lord is the wise life. Proverbs also shows us that "the fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (cf., 9:10). The lady worth admiring and emulating is the one who pursues wisdom, which means she submits to God, reveres God, and worships God. Significance and value is not about passing beauty; it's about possessing wisdom that leads proper worship of God. Proverbs says, "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, is a beautiful woman without discretion (Prov 11:22)." The attractiveness of a beautiful ring is likened to the attractiveness of a lady, but that beauty is nullified if it is in a pig's snout! Ladies, pursue wisdom.

What about men? The same applies. Adonijah and Absalom also illustrate how men may be suitable for a magazine covers, but are not worth following if they lack godly wisdom. Do not determine your significance and worth by external appearance, but by internal submission to God.

Let me ask another additional and related question: How should a Christian measure spiritual growth? Do not be deceived by the Christian sub-culture. Being able

to name a bunch of preachers does not equal spiritual maturity. Reading numerous articles at Gospel Coalition (or any other Christian website) does not equal spiritual growth either. Spiritual growth is not just about being moved at a worship gathering, attending lectures, or hearing sermons. One can do all of these things and live in total rebellion. You can have head full of theology, but have a train wreck of a life or marriage. One can cry during a set of songs, but be addicted to porn.

One of the concerns for the Apostle Paul was that Christ's church would grow in *wisdom* (Eph 1:17; Col 1:9). If a person is not growing in wisdom, they aren't growing in maturity.

What is wisdom? The topic is complex. An entire chapter could be written on it. Let me try to mention six inter-related dimensions of biblical wisdom (though I'm sure more could be listed). First, wisdom has a *worship* dimension. As mentioned, the fear of the Lord is the starting place for wisdom. If you don't worship the real God, then you aren't wise, according to Scripture. You can be intelligent, win at trivial pursuit, have more degrees than Fahrenheit, but if you aren't a worshiper, you aren't wise.

Second, wisdom has an *insight* dimension. The wise person has insight into spiritual truth (4:6, 7). They possess an ever increasing thirst for wisdom (9:8-9), unlike the fool, the scoffer or the simple who rejects it and is "wise in their own eyes" (cf, Prov 13:1; 26:16). In the New Testament, we read that the Holy Spirit opens up our eyes to give us wisdom and insight that we may know God better (cf., Eph 1:17-21; 1 Cor 2:14-16).

Third, wisdom has a *discernment* dimension. The wise person can read a situation and make the right decision, as we will see Solomon do in 1 Kings 3:16-28. "The wise of heart is called discerning" (16:21, cf 17:24). Paul prays that the Philippians would grow in wisdom and all discernment (Phil 1:9).

Fourth, wisdom has *moral* dimension (cf, Prov 14:16). Throughout Proverbs, wisdom and purity go together. A wise person has discretion. Youth are addressed a lot in Proverbs because they need discretion ("youth" 1:4; "My son"). For example, they avoid prostitutes (Prov 5-7). They wise prefer good over evil (cf., 1 Kings 3:9; Prov 3:7-8). In James, wisdom involves virtues such as "purity" and "peacemaking" (3:17-18). The wise person is open to correction, as well.

Fifth, wisdom has a *justice* dimension. Proverbs opens by speaking of this: "to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity" (1:3). After speaking of God who gives wisdom, he says, "Then you will understand justice" (2:9). Those who are in leadership are particularly praised for using wisdom to do justice. In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as "Lady Wisdom," and the text says, "By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern

justly” (Prov 8:15-16; c.f., 29:4). At the end of Proverbs, the King’s mother taught him this saying, “Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (31:9) We will see an example of this in Solomon’s life in chapter 3.

Finally, wisdom has a *skill* dimension. The book of Proverbs describes the wise person has the one who is skillful in building. God in wisdom "founded the earth" (3:19). Lady Wisdom was "like a master workman" (Prov 8:30). Leithart says,

In Scripture, wisdom is more closely associated with the skill of the woodcutter than the ecstasies of the mystic. The Hebrew word for wisdom means ‘artistic skill’ (Ex 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; 1 Kings 7:14).... Proverbs is a book of instruction concerning skillful living, teaching how to construct a life that is attractive, fitting, and beautiful (Leithart, 43).

In the case of Solomon, his skill was displayed in a variety of ways, such as politics and the building of the temple.

How does one acquire wisdom? The "humble" find wisdom (Prov 11:2) by practicing some humble acts. As this passage teaches (and others teach [James 1:5]), we should earnestly seek our gracious God for wisdom. We should also study Scripture to grow in wisdom (cf., Prov 7:1-5). Paul says that he Scriptures are “able to make us wise for salvation in Christ” (2 Tim 3:15b). People go everywhere looking for wisdom – John Tesh, *Intelligence for Life*, Oprah, Dear Abby, Dr. Phil to name a few. But God to Scripture, for God "makes wise the simple" (Ps 19:7). We should also seek biblical community go grow in wisdom. We read in Proverbs: “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov 13:20). "The lips of the wise spread knowledge" (Prov 15:7).

But we must also point out that wisdom is found ultimately in and through Christ. Wisdom is not just a set of ideas. Wisdom is in a person. In Christ, are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). How can you experience the dimensions of wisdom just listed? In Christ. It is in Christ that we come into a relationship with God enabling us to worship God with a healthy fear. In Christ, we can have insight and discernment as we put on “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). In Christ, we see what a wise, a godly life looks like, and in Christ we have power to live it out. In Christ, we see a king judging righteously. In Christ, we see what a skilled craftsman looks like, as he created the world that we live in, and is now building the kingdom of God. To walk away from Christ, is to walk away from wisdom.

You may be educated, but apart from Christ, you are not wise. My friend, Philip, leads a church plant that ministers a lot to the homeless. They recently had a guy come to faith in Christ who was named “Knowledge Supreme Scientific.” He just got out of prison, where he was a leader in the Islamic movement, but they took him in, won him to

Christ, and are watching him grow in wisdom. Knowledge found true wisdom by finding Christ. Now, he leads their hospitality ministry at the church (and read a book we recommend *A Meal with Jesus*). You may think you are wise, and even have a name like Knowledge, but wisdom is in a person: Jesus.

## **The Wisdom of Solomon**

### **Early Warning Signs (3:1-4)**

Solomon's life has both positive and negative examples for us. Some paint Solomon in a very positive light until chapter 11. However, the early chapters show us some negatives, as well (some of his actions in 2:13-46 are also questionable). These early warning signs become greater and greater sins for Solomon later. While the text says that he "loved the Lord" in 1 Kings 3:3, Solomon was a man with a divided heart.

What were these early warning signs? First, Solomon chose the wrong woman. This was not wise! It says that he entered into a "marriage alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt" and he took his daughter and "brought her into the city of David" (1). This verse emphasizes marital relationship (Olley, 59). She probably was not a believer. Therefore, Solomon was unequally yoked with an unbeliever. The Bible supports the marriage between couples of a different race, but not of different faiths (cf., 2 Cor 6:14). God explicitly forbade the marrying of a foreigner in Deut 7:3-4 because of the danger of apostasy. Thus, Solomon is already breaking David's charge in 1 Kings 2:1-4 to keep the law of Moses. His love for foreign women, eventually led him down an awful path of idolatry later in his life (1 Kings 11:1-2). Let him stand as a warning to those who are in a relationship with someone who is not a Christ-follower. Solomon lacked wisdom because he did not have a proper reverence for God and his word.

Second, Solomon formed an alliance with Egypt – of all places! Egypt has negative connotations through the OT (though a future hope for Egyptian's salvation was promised in Isa 19:19-25; Ez 29:13-16). He probably intended to secure peace between the nations with this royal marriage. In those days, this type of union was common. The problem is that God wanted his people to trust in him alone, and the Egyptians had been enemies of God. In Deuteronomy, God predicted that Israel would have a king, and he gave them specific instructions, like not taking too many wives, following God's law, and not returning to Egypt to form close relations with them (Deut 17:14-20).

Here is an important application: do not conform to the patterns of the world, though some actions make sense to the world. Solomon was living out the values of the culture, but he was violating God's Word. A prevalent example of this today is cohabitation. When people talk about cohabitation, they have a lot of reasons why couples should do this. They say things like "You should test drive the car before you

drive it.” “It’s cheaper.” “You need to see if you’re compatible.” The problem is, it is not God’s plan for marriage. Over and over we come back to this fundamental issue: Whose authority are you living under? What are you allowing to shape you? Culture? Your Feelings? Or Scripture? The write of Proverbs says, “Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered” (Prov 28:26). Do not trust in your own mind, or the minds of others, but look to God’s Word for wisdom and experience freedom and fulfillment.

We then read that Solomon was also worshiping at the high places (3:2-4). High places have a negative connotation, as the rest of Kings demonstrates. They were elevated places where people worshiped false gods. Why is Solomon worshiping there? At least three views exist. (1) The temple had not been built, and it was therefore acceptable to worship at the high places (2 Chron 1:3 does not mention “high places” and says that “the Tent of Meeting was at Gibeon,” viewing this in a positive light). Perhaps Solomon was just expressing that David's God was his God. (2) He was being disobedient in worshiping there (see Deut. 12:2-4). With this view, the fact that God appeared to him is a picture of divine grace not Solomon’s obedience (Ryken, 75). (3) He was delayed in building the temple because his heart was distracted by other things, such as his foreign wife (Provan, 45). Verse 15 says after Solomon meets with God at the high places, then Solomon goes to Jerusalem to worship (3:15). This was either because he was wrong in the first place to go to Gibeon and in wisdom he changed places, or because it was previously okay to be at Gibeon, and this points forward to Solomon building the temple in Jerusalem. Regardless of your position, the “potential for disaster is clear enough, and 11:33 will tell us of a people who eventually follow Solomon into sin” (Provan, 45).

Solomon’s love was fragile. He was a lot like us. He loved the Lord, but he also had false loves. We face the same struggle. In the words of Luther, we are at the same time, righteous and sinners (*simul iustus et peccator*). This highlights the grace of God in Solomon’s life, and in our lives. It also highlights the need for us to “be killing [indwelling] sin, or it will be killing you” (John Owen). Paul said, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies that you obey its desires” (Rom 6:12). Do not allow these false loves to remain, but put them to death, that your devotion to Yahweh may be wholehearted devotion.

Turning to some positive examples, let us apply three principles related to wisdom 3:5-5:18: (1) seek wisdom, (2) use wisdom, and (3) spread wisdom.

### **#1: Seek Wisdom (3:5-15)**

Despite some of Solomon’s foolish decisions, the following verses show us a positive example. In 1 Kings 3:5-15, five times the word “ask” is used, and five times the word “give” is used. God invites us to ask, and God loves to give us wisdom. In the

previous chapter Solomon's wisdom was mentioned (2:6, 9). Some argue that he was behaving like every other Near Eastern King. He needed God's gift of wisdom to lead differently.

***Solomon's Request.*** In his request for wisdom, we can at least three important lessons. To start, Solomon *roots his request in the gospel*. He says, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father.... And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day" (3:6a). At first glance, you may just think that Solomon is talking about his dad. And he is. But this mention of David rooted in God's covenant promise to have a king sit on the throne, a son of David. While Kings shows us the nation in decline, it also shows us the faithfulness of God. If Solomon can marvel at the faithfulness of God to appoint him as king, how much more should we marvel at God's faithfulness to set forth Christ as King?

In the New Testament, Jesus' identity, as the Son of David, is mentioned several times. In Matthew, the opening words read, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matt 1:1). When Mary is told about the upcoming birth of Christ, Gabriel said to her, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). When Paul writes to the Romans he says that Jesus was "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3). "The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has conquered" the elder in Rev 5:5 says!

One reason for a lack of prayer is a feeling of unworthiness. But our prayers, like Solomon, are founded upon the gospel. We can approach God because God is kind, merciful, and is a promise-keeping God, who saves sinners, through Jesus Christ, our King. If you think, "I can't pray and ask for anything. I'm not good enough." You are right! But Christ is! Meditate on the grace and faithfulness of God as you pray.

Next, Solomon demonstrates *humble dependence*. He says, "I am but a little child. I don't know how to go out or come in" (7b). This does not refer to his age (for he was old enough to father a child) or to complete ignorance (he acted in the previous chapter) but to his child like dependence. Here, Solomon shows us what childlike, dependent prayer looks like. He confesses that the job is over his head, "your people ... are too many to be numbered" (8). I can imagine my eight year old's response if I said, "Go play in the NFL." He would feel a bit inadequate!

Here we find another reason for prayerlessness. We arrogantly believe in our own self-sufficiency. A self-righteous person does not ask God for help. The desperate child goes to God and asks. Perhaps you say, "Yeah, if God came to me and said, 'Ask me,' then I would." But he has said this to you! Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given"

(Matt 7:7). He then used an illustration of a child saying that if a child asked their father for a fish, he would not give them a rock (Matt 7:9). Then he said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matt 7:11). My son just asked me to go eat at CiCi's for salad and pizza. I did not say, "Hey lets just eat some candles and a nerf football." I care for my children, and I want to feed them. How much more with our perfect Father! Go to God with a humble, childlike dependence.

James says that you have not because you ask not, and when you do ask you desire to feed your flesh (James 4:2-3) Notice next that Solomon asks for the right thing...

Finally, Solomon *asks for the right gift: wisdom*. He prays, "Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people" (3:9). His understanding of wisdom includes a fear of the Lord (as he acknowledges who God is and what he has done), just governance, discernment, good and evil, and by implication the skill to lead well.

You might think, "Yeah, that's Solomon. He needs wisdom. He's a king. But not me." You are right in that he needed wisdom, but you are wrong in thinking you don't need it. Whatever you do in this life in the name of Jesus is important. Greater responsibility and honor will come for those in the next life who have been faithful with the small things in this life (Luke 16:10). The godly janitor who scrubs toilets orderly, on time, and to the glory of Christ may find himself honored by Christ with a greater and more glorious realm of responsibility than the famous mega church pastor who did his work for the praise of people (Rus Moore, "Personal and Cosmic Eschatology," 915). Do not underestimate small things. Jesus said those who welcome the marginalized will be rewarded at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14). Hosting others requires skill and wisdom.

Seek wisdom. It is more valuable than jewels (Prov 8:11). God grants it to us because he is abundantly generous and gracious.

**God's Response (10-14).** The writer says, "It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this." Notice that God was not bothered by Solomon's request. God delights in the prayers of his people, especially prayers that are not self-centered, but instead are about serving God's people. Do not expect God to answer prayers like, "Please help me break into this house" or "Please help me escape from the police" or "Please help me get into this club." God is pleased to answer prayers that serve in his mission.

We also see God's prerogative to give Solomon more than he asked for. God promises to also give him riches and honor that surpass other kings, and if Solomon is faithful, he promises to lengthen his days. We should not read this like a trick. "If we ask

for wisdom, will God give me a new Escalade?” We should read it as a simple example of Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (an interesting feature of this passage is the mention of Solomon’s attire and how God clothes the flowers more magnificently in 6:28-32) The best thing Solomon received was wisdom.

Next, the text says that Solomon awakes from the dream (like a second Adam in charge of the temple; only awakened to Lady Wisdom instead of Eve? See Leithart, 44-45). Solomon then goes to the Jerusalem to worship, the future place of the temple. He offers sacrifices. Why? He has learned the right place to worship, but there is more. It seems that with this gift of wisdom comes an understanding of our need for mercy. This sacrifice pictured the ultimate sacrifice offered by Jesus. The easiest way to turn away from wisdom is to turn away from seeing your need for Christ. When you prideful fail to recognize your sinfulness, and need for blood forgiveness, then you are turning away from wisdom. The person who goes through the day not realizing the need for the Savior is not a wise man. He also goes to offer praise to God. Because God gives the gift, and God provides forgiveness, God deserves the praise.

## **#2: Use Wisdom (3:16-4:20)**

Solomon demonstrates wisdom in two ways that we should use wisdom. He uses wisdom to bless the powerless, and he uses wisdom to lead faithfully and skillfully.

***Use wisdom for the powerless (16-28).*** Many became prostitutes out of economic desperation or by voluntary slavery. They could have been desperate widows who were desperately trying to stay alive, or they could have chosen this lifestyle over other alternatives (seems unlikely). We do not know. Ladies were thus left without a protective male (Olley, 66). The story is pretty straightforward but we are left without a lot details. Did they intend to get pregnant? What was their plan for the babies? Did they plan to help each other with the child, when the other was “working?” We do not know. In our day, would they have preferred an abortion? One thing is for certain: they were not the most respected members of their society. Yet the king uses his wisdom and love cares for them, even though some probably would not give them the time of day.

In the first half of the story, the king listens (16-22). In the second part of the story, the king speaks (23-28). What he says is shocking, but is genius. One presents her case (17-21), then the other simply denies the claim (22). It reminds me of Proverbs 18:17. There are no independent witnesses so this is a difficult case –she said, she said.

Solomon responds by calling for the “sword” (24). He will use it to administer justice. His unexpected words are these: “Divide the living child in two, and give half to one and half to the other” (25). Since there is no proof, one might reject the plaintiff’s



case. But Solomon understands the relationship between a mother and a child, and he appeals to that motherly instinct to find the truth. He uses discernment to administer justice. The rightful mother says, "Do not kill him. Give him to her." The lying woman says, viciously, "Divide him" (26). Solomon relies on God's wisdom to give the baby to the right mother, who helped to save her child by her compassion. As a result it says that Israel was "in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice" (28). The king is living out the values of his God who "executes justice for the oppressed" (Ps 146:7). The Psalmist said, "The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have established equity in Jacob" (Ps 99:4).

We have much to learn here about caring for the powerless. Notice how Solomon sees beyond her being a "prostitute" to her being a "mother" (Olley, 28). He values her, as we should value everyone created in God's image. Do not dismiss individuals who are in dark situations. For we were in a dark situation, as well! Many of you are caring for individuals that are marginalized. That is wonderful. Value those who are not valued, giving evidence that you are a kingdom citizen.

We also should remember that we need wisdom to care for the various groups of the powerless. We need discernment to care for rescued victims of trafficking, on an organizational level, governmental level, church level, and on a personal level. We need wisdom on how to do transitional assistance for those who transition out of foster care and orphanages. Couples adopting need wisdom to carefully and justly pursue the fatherless, as a lot of recent concern has developed related to the integrity of international adoptions. We need benevolent wisdom on how to bless the single mom, and the lonely widow, the homeless and the prostitute.

Further, we need to also pray for those in positions of leadership, who work on behalf of those in need. Paul tells us to pray for "kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Tim 2:2). Currently, many political leaders defend the need to protect kids in schools, tightening up security, but allow for the unborn (the most powerless in society) to go unprotected. We are called to be a voice for the voiceless and to pray for God to change leaders' hearts (Prov 21:1)

After Solomon dies, many kings fail to administer justice and defend the needy. However, the Old Testament has a sustained word of hope that the Messiah will ultimately come. Jeremiah spoke God's word saying, "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land" (Jer 23:5). Jesus Christ was the ultimate wise king that was promised. His wisdom was displayed in his ability to discern the heart of a person (like the woman at the well). His mercy and justice and wisdom was put on full display at the cross (1 Cor 1:24). And eventually, he will return to this broken world, and establish his everlasting rule, in which there will be no more evil. We stand in awe of that King today, and we long for his appearing.

One way to see the connection of Solomon's reign and Jesus' superior reign is by considering Solomon's prayer in Psalm 72.

- 1 Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to the royal son!
- 2 May he judge your people with righteousness,  
and your poor with justice!
- 3 Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness!
- 4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the children of the needy,  
and crush the oppressor!
- 5 May they fear you[a] while the sun endures,  
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!
- 6 May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,  
like showers that water the earth!
- 7 In his days may the righteous flourish,  
and peace abound, till the moon be no more!
- 8 May he have dominion from sea to sea,  
and from the River[b] to the ends of the earth!
- 9 May desert tribes bow down before him,  
and his enemies lick the dust!
- 10 May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands  
render him tribute;  
may the kings of Sheba and Seba  
bring gifts!
- 11 May all kings fall down before him,  
all nations serve him!
- 12 For he delivers the needy when he calls,  
the poor and him who has no helper.
- 13 He has pity on the weak and the needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.
- 14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life,  
and precious is their blood in his sight.
- 15 Long may he live;  
may gold of Sheba be given to him!  
May prayer be made for him continually,  
and blessings invoked for him all the day!
- 16 May there be abundance of grain in the land;

on the tops of the mountains may it wave;  
may its fruit be like Lebanon;  
and may people blossom in the cities  
like the grass of the field!  
17 May his name endure forever,  
his fame continue as long as the sun!  
May people be blessed in him,  
all nations call him blessed!

Here, Solomon is praying for himself, as the royal son in need of wisdom. He prayed for help to rule justly, and defend those in need (1-4), as demonstrated in the case of this compassionate mother. (Notice how mercy and justice go together, mercy for the victim, and justice for the perpetrator). The prayer also involves a cry for justice in the future kingdom (5-ff), and the Messianic rule. Jesus came announcing his arrival saying that part of his purpose was to “set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). In his ministry, Jesus demonstrated mercy and justice by ministering to those in need. At the cross, Jesus’ mercy and justice were on fully display. There, Jesus died for those who had broken God’s law, satisfying the justice of God by taking their penalty, and demonstrating the love of God by saving sinners. We are part of his kingdom. We await with anticipation the not yet part of the kingdom. Then we will know everlasting peace.

***Wisdom to Lead Others Faithfully and Skillfully (4:1-20)***. The writer says that Solomon “was king over all of Israel” in verse 1. At the end of the unit, he says, “Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy” (20). Moses longed for this land, Joshua conquered enemies for it, David subdued it, and now Solomon and the people enjoyed it. God kept his promises. You too should enjoy the promises of God in celebration and thankfulness.

In between verses 1 and 20, we see evidence of his structure and organization and his diplomacy that lead to such happiness. Religious, political, and economic leaders are mentioned here. The first four are possibly the inner cabinet (1-3; Olley, 69). Next, we read of a second level of leaders (4-6). The term “forced labor” in verse 6 does not refer to men with whips barking threats to slaves. It probably refers to putting one’s self into the service of another family due to economic pressures. Then we read that Israel was divided into twelve administrative districts for taxation purposes (7-19, Olley, 70). In verse 20, we read of the great growth of Israel (cf., Gen 22:17). The growth demanded wisdom in organization (for more, see Provan, 54-56).

Business leaders need wisdom to organize growing business to go from “good to great to built to last” in the words of Jim Collins (*Good to Great*). Families need wisdom to organize their life for effecting childhood development. Children need wisdom to

prioritize their life and complete their tasks. College students and grad students need wisdom to give proper attention to family, work, studies and the church.

Church leaders need wisdom as the church grows. In Acts 6, a need arises to care for widows. At that point, the church had grown tremendously, and the apostles could not oversee this legitimate need. So they appoint some leaders and allocate responsibilities for effective shepherding. At IDC, we have gone through a lot of growth and change, and are in need of wisdom. We went from a group of fifteen in my house to over 400 every Sunday, with 320 in one of our 23 small groups. This all in 18 months! The goal in organization in a church is for disciple-making, community building and mission. Please note that organization alone will not change anyone's life. The purpose is to facilitate growth in the best possible way. It is possible to spend all of one's time in structure and forget that ministry is about people (this point is made well in the excellent book *The Trellis and the Vine*). This need for sufficient structure to provide effective contexts for personal discipling relationships demands wisdom. Thankfully, we are not left on our own in this, for God gives wisdom to those who ask, and God gives the spiritual gift of administration to some in the church (1 Cor 12:28).

The happiness in the kingdom at this point in the Kings narrative points ahead to another kingdom. We await the King's arrival, in which we sit down with our Messiah-King at the end times banquet.

### **#3: Spread Wisdom (4:21-5:18)**

Next we read of the wisdom and glory of the king spreading among the nations. In verses 21, we read how Solomon's rule extended "over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt." This large area, which is further explained in verse 24, corresponds to the promise to Abraham in Gen 15:18. Verse 22 says that these nations "brought tribute and served Solomon" all the days of his life. As a result of the massive amount of food and resources coming into Israel, the text says that all of Israel was blessed ("in safety," "under his vine," "under his fig tree," 4:25). The picture here is that Solomon's reign initially brought prosperity and peace. This scene reminds us Micah's picture painted on the kingdom in the "last days" (Micah 4:1-5), in which the nations come into Zion, which everyone sits without fear under their vine and fig tree.

It also triggers our minds forward to a Messianic feast described by Jesus (cf., Matt 8:11). The nations are invited into the kingdom of God. It is our job as ambassadors of the kingdom to invite them.

In verses 26-28, we detect some problems, however. Solomon is violating another command. In Deuteronomy 17:16 the king is forbidden to go to Egypt to acquire a great number of horses and further forbids him from making the people return to Egypt

to “get more of them.” In 1 Kings 10:26-29, we see him breaking this command again, right before we read of his apostasy in 11:1. Provan says, “It is a bomb that will tick away quietly, along with all the others in 1 Kings 1-11, until the combined explosion occurs in 11-12” (59).

Despite this negative note, the wisdom of Solomon continues to attract attention. His wisdom surpasses everyone (29-32), greater than those known for wisdom (cf., Matt. 2:1-12). The writer says that he was famous in all the surrounding nations (4:31). Solomon’s gift of wisdom was displayed by his speaking of Proverbs and his singing of songs (eg., Song of Sol 1:1).

Biblical scholars points out that 1 Kings 5:1-15 form part of the material in chapter 4; that they are part of the same unit describing Solomon’s rule over the surrounding kingdoms, and his unparalleled wisdom (5:7, 12). In this section, Solomon takes advantage of his friendly relationship with the next-door king (an island force about half-mile from the coast), Hiram of Tyre, to help in building the temple, which is made possible by a time of peace (he put all David’s enemies “under his feet,” 5:3; cf., Ps 110:1; 1 Chron 22:7-10; 28:2-3). Hiram was previously involved in David’s building project, supplying wood, carpenters, and stonemasons (cf., 2 Sam 5:11; Hiram also built impressive worship centers, House, 122). They were experts in building techniques (6). Solomon asks for skilled men and materials, especially the cedars, and he promises to pay Hiram’s servants. Hiram negotiates, saying that his men should deal with cutting and transporting the wood (in contrast to Solomon’s desire for cooperation, v. 6). Then he tells him that he should pay his royal household (5-9). Solomon receives trees; Hiram receives food (8-9). So, here goods are leaving Israel for another king (10-11). This seems like peaceful arrangement (12).

In verses 13-18, however, it seems that Solomon ignores the work methods described! The previously mentioned cooperation that Solomon wished for in verse 6, is exactly what he find in verse 14-18 (Provan). A task force of 30,000 men serves for three month periods, making an annual total of 120,000 men! The rotation includes working a month in Lebanon and two months in Jerusalem (13-14). Another massive group work (150,000 men) in the hills cutting the stone for the foundation (15-17). This was an impressive project! In verse 18, we see that the men of Gibeon (a mountain, north of the Promised Land) also assisted them.

Therefore, Solomon negotiates some with Hiram, but also ignores him. His rule over the nations mentioned in verse 21 applies here. For he is dominant over the king it seems, though he wisely chooses to cooperate to a certain extent (Provan, 64). His wisdom to build such a place is also impressive.

Solomon's wisdom and glory is spreading in numerous ways. His proverbs, songs, building project, diplomacy, economic success, organizational skills, and leading national prosperity all attract worldwide attention.

### **Someone Greater Than Solomon is Here**

We have the sacred calling to make the wisdom and glory of our King known among the nations. Our King and our kingdom deserve all that we can give.

In Matthew 12, Jesus, referring to himself says that "something greater than the temple is here" (12:6); "something greater than Jonah," the prophet "is here" (12:41); and regarding the wisdom of Solomon, "something greater than Solomon is here" (12:42). Jesus elevated himself above the three greatest institutions of Israel – prophet, priest and king.

Jesus is superior person than Solomon. He never drifted into idolatry or made foolish decisions that led him into sin. He was the sinless King. He always did that which pleased the father, being the ultimate example of a repeated Proverb, "a wise son makes a glad father."

Jesus also had superior wisdom. In Isaiah, the Messiah has the "spirit of wisdom" resting upon him. In Nazareth, they marveled at Jesus' wisdom (Mark 6:2). The same word for "parables" is the word for "Proverbs." Jesus, spoke with infinite wisdom in these parables. Not only did he astonish people with his teaching, but his work on the cross has "become our wisdom" (1 Cor 1:30). Jesus' work on the cross is "folly to some," but to we who believe it is "the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18-25, 30).

Jesus' temple is greater than Solomon, since he is our temple! He is the place we go to for worship (Mark 14:58).

Jesus' kingdom is more glorious. It is better organized, as the Spirit of God works to create order, not chaos (demonstrated at Pentecost, a reversal of babel). He creates in us the fruits of the Spirit that leads to harmonious relationships. Jesus' kingdom is bigger than Solomon's kingdom, with people from all nations coming into it all the time. This was the promise given to Abraham. It was partially seen in Solomon's reign, but in Christ it is coming entirely true. Jesus' kingdom of greater happiness and peace, for we know that his kingdom cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28).

As we, the King's people, we spread the wisdom and glory of our King by proclaiming the gospel, and by doing deeds of mercy and justice. We are called to spread his glory among the nations (Ps 96:3).

The biblical vision of Christ's kingdom is awe-inspiring. It will extend from shore to shore, until it finally covers the earth with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14). And we want to see the nations be swept up in this glory. Phil Ryken says it well, "Our desire is for the Lord Jesus Christ to receive as much honor as possible, from as many people as possible, in as many places as possible, for he alone deserves all the glory" (107).

My friend, the wisest thing you can do is repent of your sin, and place your faith in King Jesus. Pay true homage to him. Say, "You are my King. I am your servant. I will submit to your will. I will listen to your wisdom in your word."

If you have received Christ as your Savior-King, then seek our gracious God for wisdom. Seek wisdom to help you lead your family, make wise decisions in your vocation, serve others in the church, and to spread the King's wisdom and glory among the nations.