

# (1 Kings) the Wisdom of Solomon

by David Guzik

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*David Guzik's sermon explores the early reign of Solomon, emphasizing the importance of wisdom and discernment in leadership.*

**Duration:** 1:08:39

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 3:16, 1 Kings 4:26, 1 Kings 6:1, 1 Kings 8:22-23, 1 Kings 10:1, 1 Kings 11:1-3, 1 Kings 11:9-10

**Topics:** "Faithful Service", "Spiritual Leadership"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of organization and order in the Bible. He uses the example of God organizing the Israelites in the book of Numbers to emphasize the significance of being organized as a nation. The speaker also highlights how Solomon's heart drifted away from the Lord, leading him to make foolish decisions that had long-lasting consequences for Israel. He encourages listeners to fulfill their own potential and serve God faithfully, while also recognizing the need for a genuine relationship with Him.

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## Transcript

All right, tonight we're going to consider First Kings chapters three and four. Last week we took a look at chapters one and two and we saw the beginning of the reign of Solomon and how actually he got off to a very good start in his reign. His father David was very careful to make sure that the throne successfully passed from David to Solomon, even though there was another one, another son of David, Adonai, who tried to take the throne, but David successfully blocked Adonai and put Solomon in as the king.

And we saw that Solomon started out with great wisdom because there were enemies that stayed over from the previous reign of David. There were people that he had to deal with and we saw that Solomon had the wisdom to deal with each case individually. Isn't that important? I mean, when you're a leader and you're dealing with people, it's important to see that not every situation is the same.

And Solomon was wise and gracious enough to deal with each situation individually. And I told you that in some ways at the end of chapter two, even though it's still very early in the story of Solomon, we almost reached the height of Solomon's walk with God at the end of chapter two, although that's going to need some explaining tonight. But let's look now at a verse one of chapter three.

Now, Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh's daughter. And he brought her to the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and

a wall all around Jerusalem. Now marriage to fellow royalty was a common practice in the ancient world, as it is in our world today.

You know, when a prince or a princess is looking for a suitable marriage partner, they always look first among other royalty. And even if they end up marrying a commoner, that's not what they would prefer to do. They'd prefer to marry somebody with some kind of royal blood in them.

And it wasn't just that desire to associate with your own people, your own class. They also saw that it was important to marry among other royal families to help make political alliances. If you were the pharaoh of Egypt and your daughter was married to King Solomon of Israel, there would be much more likely to be peace among those two nations.

And so these were not just romances, they were political alliances as well. But there's something that you need to understand. This was not Solomon's first marriage.

By reading it here in chapter three, verse one, you would think that it was wouldn't you? But first Kings chapter 14, verse 21, tells us that Solomon's son, Rehoboam, came to the throne when he was 41 years old. And first Kings 11, verse 42, tells us that Solomon reigned 40 years. This means that Rehoboam was born to his mother, which was a wife of Solomon named Namah the Ammonitess, before he came to the throne and before he married this daughter of Pharaoh.

So this was not Solomon's first wife. This was perhaps the second, the third. We don't know exactly, but it was not Solomon's first wife.

And these multiple marriages of Solomon and might I say his marriages to foreign women would cause a great spiritual disaster in his life. Keep a finger here in first Kings chapter three. I want you to turn to the book of Nehemiah, chapter 13, in Nehemiah, chapter 13.

Nehemiah is warning the people of God about the great dangers that would come to them as they lived in this land of Israel. Nehemiah, chapter 13, beginning at verse 25. Nehemiah remembers Solomon's bad example as a way of rebuking the people of Israel.

Look at it here. He says, so I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair and made them swear by God, saying, you shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. What is Nehemiah upset about? He's upset about the people of Israel marrying, intermarrying with the pagan nations around them.

Now, look at verse 26. Did not Solomon, the king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him who is beloved of his God. And God made him king over all Israel.

Nevertheless, pagan women caused even him to sin. You have to think about that. If Nehemiah, many hundreds of years after the time of Solomon, is looking back to Solomon and using him as a bad example, that should really make us take note.

And it's very sad that right here in chapter three, verse one, you find Solomon marrying this foreign woman and these foreign wives were going to be the downfall of Solomon. Now, let's make something perfectly clear. It's not that they were foreigners.

It's not that they came from another nation. It's not because, you know, they may be even of a different look or a different race. All of that is irrelevant.

The fact is, is that they worshiped other gods and they brought this worship of these other gods into the life of Solomon and into the life of Israel. The foreign wives made Solomon more than just a bad example that Nehemiah quotes later. You could say that they ruined his spiritual life.

I don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves. But in First Kings chapter 11, it says that when Solomon was old, his heart turned away from God and that it was these foreign wives that turned his heart away from God. But you would have to say something.

Even if this happened when he was old, the pattern was set when he was young. Isn't this the way it is with many sins in our life? Many sins which ruin a person when they are old. They didn't begin in their life when they were old.

The pattern was set when the person was young and the sin was not dealt with when the person was young. And therefore, it became a crippling, a debilitating sin in their life later on in life. I have to say one more thing about this.

We also should consider just at least for a moment Solomon's father, David. Right. Did you know that David also married pagan women or foreign women? At least I should say there's a woman called Macha, the daughter of Talmi, the king of Geshur.

David was able to marry this foreign woman, yet it was not an obstacle to his own relationship with God. It wasn't the fact that the woman was a foreigner that was bad. The fact of it was was that she was a foreigner who kept her pagan gods and introduced this pagan worship into Israel.

All right, now on to verse two, it says, Meanwhile, the people sacrificed at the high places because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days. And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father, David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places. Now, the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place.

Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. Now, at this time, altars were allowed in Israel at various high places. Israel, wonderful place to visit.

If you've never visited, it's worth taking a tour of Israel. You would see that the geography of Israel is hilly. It's filled with hills.

And commonly they would build altars or shrines to their gods on the top of these hills for a very simple reason. The idea was you were closer to your God. I mean, you were up in a prominent place.

Now, this also carried over into the worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel. They built altars of sacrifice to Yahweh on the tops of these high hills. Now, this is a very interesting thing because it was definitely a sin.

God wanted all the sacrifice at Israel to be done at a central place at the tabernacle, which they built in the days of Moses, but was still existing at this time, or at the temple, which Solomon will later build. He wanted all the sacrifice to come to the central place, the tabernacle, and then later the temple. But it seems that God almost winked at this sin, that he showed grace towards it because he didn't seem to penalize Israel that heavy with it.

When you see it mentioned in the Bible, you always have the sense that God is not pleased with it, yet he never seems to bring judgment or discipline against Israel for this practice. I don't think that it was so much the high places that ruined Solomon, although it was not good, he should not have done it. It's more the way that it's put for us in these two verses, or actually these three verses, as you see in there in verse three, where it says, and Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father, David, except.

Now that's always a bad thing, isn't it? To have that said of anybody. They loved the Lord and they obeyed him, except for this or that, that they did. Again, he generally walked in the statutes of his father, David.

He did what David told him to do, except that he allowed these high places. And so it seems that God was showing some mercy to Israel and to Solomon while these high places existed until the temple was built. Now.

At this high place at Gibeon, which was the great high place, it says that Solomon came and offered a thousand burnt offerings. I want you to think about that for a minute. Very easy for us to read something like that in the Bible.

It's okay. Pass it by and go on to the next verse. Do you realize what it means to sacrifice a thousand large animals? You know, these weren't like mice or hamsters that they were sacrificing.

These were big animals. These were, these were cattle. These were oxen.

These were sheep and goats. I want you to think about how much work it was to sacrifice these animals. You know, when you go drive by the butcher shop and see that's a hard job, isn't it? And today they have electric saws and they have power equipment that they use.

Back then it was all, you know, with knives and hand saws and doing the whole work. This was in many ways, the worship of ancient Israel would remind a person more of a modern butcher shop than it would have a church because it was bloody. It was messy.

It was filled with the blood of the animals and the sweat of the priests. And this was a thousand animals offered at the burnt offering. And this important event marked what we might consider to be the ceremonial beginning of Solomon's reign.

Now, according to second Chronicles chapter one, the entire leadership of the nation went with Solomon to Gibeah. So this was sort of an official ceremony. Solomon was holding the beginning, the ceremonial beginning of his reign, saying, yes, we're going to market with these thousand sacrifices to glorify God.

And he did it there because there was the great high place. And what made this high place great? Well, it seems from comparing this text with second Chronicles, what made this high place great was that this is where the Ark of the Covenant, excuse me, this is where the tabernacle was, even though the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem. This is a little bit strange.

It gets a little bit confusing here. But we know that at the end of second Samuel, David had the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem. But it seems that the tabernacle stayed in Gibeah.

And there's many people who wonder, well, why? Why didn't David leave the Ark of the Covenant with Gibeah? And it seems to me that the best answer is, is that David knew that the temple had to come to Jerusalem and had to be built at that place. And so he brought the Ark of the Covenant there, but he

feared that if you brought the whole tabernacle there, then people would just be satisfied with having the tabernacle in Jerusalem instead of following through and saying, let's build the temple. So for this period of years, you had sort of a strange arrangement in the worship of Israel.

You had the tabernacle at one place and the Ark of the Covenant at another place. And so here Solomon makes this amazing sacrifice at Gibeon. And now in verse five, well, something remarkable happens in the life of Solomon.

It says at Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night. And God said, ask, what shall I give you? Solomon said, you have shown great mercy to your servant, David, my father, because he walked before you in truth, in righteousness and in uprightness of heart with you. You have continued this great kindness for him and you have given him a son to sit on his throne as it is this day.

Again, stop right there. We'll continue on in just a moment. But you need to consider the scene here.

He's offered these thousand sacrifices. He goes to bed that night and God appears to Solomon in a dream. I might say this is one of the more significant dreams in the Bible.

There's a few of them. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. Pharaoh had a dream that Joseph interpreted.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream, of course, was interpreted by Daniel. You have a few significant dreams in the Bible, and this is one of them. This didn't happen while the sacrifices were being made.

But presumably the night after they were made. So God appears to Solomon in a dream and God says to Solomon, ask, what shall I give you? Isn't that an amazing promise? God seems to offer Solomon whatever he wants. And it wasn't just because Solomon offered a thousand animals.

Maybe you think, oh, man, I want God to make that kind of offer to me. I'll offer a thousand sacrifices. That wasn't it.

It was because his heart was surrendered to God. And God wanted to work something in Solomon through this offer and through the response of Solomon. But I can't read this without wishing that God would make that kind of offer to me.

Wouldn't you love it if God would say, listen, what do you want? What shall I give you? And then I start reading my Bible and I realize God has made such an offer to me. Right. Matthew 7, 7. Ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be open to you. Or John 15, 7. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you.

Or 1 John 5, 14. Now, this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. We have promises like this.

So you can imagine Solomon receiving this. Now, it's kind of interesting because I'm going to start applying some some evaluation of Solomon in this, although it's kind of interesting because we're considering this is Solomon in a dream. Right.

But yet I think we can still evaluate him and he's smart enough. He's wise enough to just not blurt out a request. Instead, at first he gives thanks.

It's not wonderful. He gave thanks. And he said, you have shown great mercy to your servant, David, my father, because he walked before you in truth and righteousness and an uprightness of heart with you.

And you've continued this great kindness for him. And you've given him a son to sit on the throne as it is this day. I want you to remember that.

We'll come back to it later tonight. Solomon did not say you've shown great mercy to me. He said, you've shown great mercy to my father, David.

It might seem like a small point, but you'll see why it's more important than you might think. But then Solomon goes on in verse seven and he says, now, oh, Lord, my God, you have made your servant king instead of my father, David. But I am a little child.

I do not know how to go out or to come in. It's interesting. You read some commentators on this and they'll try to make the argument that actually Solomon must have been a very young man when he made this request.

That's not the situation at all. He's a fully grown adult man. He was not really the age of a child.

He's just putting his own place in a very humble way. He's saying, God, I'm as if I were a child before you. It's this poetic way of expressing how inadequate he feels in front of the job in front of him.

And you have to say you have to love Solomon's attitude here. He says in verse seven, now, oh, Lord, my God, you've made your servant king instead of my father, David. But I am a little child.

I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen a great people too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore, give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people that I may discern between good and evil for who is able to judge this great people of yours.

You know, I think Solomon, he didn't have a false humility that said, I can't do this job, so I won't even try. Isn't that the attitude we often have instead? Solomon's attitude was this job is so much bigger than I am. I have to rely on God.

I have to receive an empowering wisdom from God to do it. And so he said, please, God, give me an understanding heart. I love how Solomon puts that there in verse nine.

Give to your servant an understanding heart. He wanted more than knowledge. He wanted understanding.

You understand the distinction between the two. A person can be very smart. They can have great knowledge, but they can lack wisdom.

They can lack life wisdom on how to deal with things. Solomon had great knowledge, but that's not what he really wanted from the Lord. He wanted understanding.

And what's great about it is he wanted the understanding in his heart. He didn't ask for it in his head. Actually, the ancient Hebrew word that's translated here, understanding, it's really translated hearing.

You know what Solomon actually asked for? He said, God, give me a hearing heart. Isn't that a beautiful request? God, give me a hearing heart, a heart that hears you, and therefore it will understand. Give me a

hearing heart.

Why? Look at it there so that I may discern between good and evil for who is able to judge this great people of yours. Solomon understood that a very important aspect of leadership is wise and just discernment. And because many leaders don't have this discernment or don't have the courage to use it, they can't lead well.

OK, so understand what Solomon's asking for. He wants to be the best king for Israel. He can be.

He looks at the job and he sees how great it is. He looks at his own weaknesses and inadequacies. And he says, God, give me the ability to do the best job for you and for your people that I can do.

And so what's God's response to that? Look at it in verse 10. The speech pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him, because you have asked for this thing and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked life the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice.

Behold, I have done according to your words. See, I have given you a wise and understanding heart so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall it like any like you arise after you. And I've also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among you among the kings all your days.

So if you walk in my ways to keep my statutes and my commandments as your father, David, walked, then I will lengthen your days. Then Solomon awoke, and indeed it had been a dream, and he came to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, offered up peace offerings, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings and made a feast for all of the servants. Was God happy or not happy with what Solomon asked for? God was happy with it.

God was pleased by what Solomon asked for because it showed that Solomon understood his great need for wisdom, for discernment and for understanding. But God was also pleased by what Solomon did not ask for in that he didn't ask for riches or fame or power for himself. Sometimes I wonder if God isn't just as pleased by what we don't ask for in prayer by what we do as he is by what we do.

And this certainly seemed to be the case with Solomon. So I have to say, you look at Solomon's request and you say, this was a good request. We're specifically told that the speech pleased the Lord.

Solomon asked for a good thing. But here's a question I have for you. Did Solomon ask for the best thing? I don't think so.

You see, in my mind, Solomon is one of the most interesting and complicated characters of the Old Testament. Here, he certainly does a good thing. Listen, I'm not trying to rewrite the Bible and make it sound as if Solomon did something bad here.

He did something good and God said so. But I don't think it was the best. Let me explain to you what I mean.

Solomon wanted wisdom and enabling from the Lord so that he could do a good job for the Lord. Now, is that a good thing? Absolutely it is. But is that the highest purpose of life? I don't believe so.

Let me put it to you this way. I think that if you would have put David into this place, that David wouldn't have asked for the ability to be a good king. You know what David would have asked for? He would have said, Lord, I want more of you.

I just want to be with you. I just want to be close to you. You remember those lovely Psalms where David says, you know, I wish like I was one of those birds that can hang out in the temple all day long.

I'm not a priest. I can't do that. I'm a king.

I wish that I was one of the birds who could just fly up and nest in the temple. That's where I want to be. That's what I want to do.

Now, what you notice is lacking from Solomon's life is real relationship with God. I think that Solomon is a powerful example, a powerful warning, especially to people like me and people like you and other people who are involved in ministry. Because when you're involved in ministry and you want to do a good job for the Lord.

It can get to the place that that's the reason why you seek God. God, that's what I really want from you. I want you to help me so that I can serve you in the best way possible.

Now, is that a bad thing? It's not a bad thing. Is it the best thing? I don't think so. This is a message that I really like to deliver to pastors, to church leaders.

Because I know in my own life, in my own soul, how easy it is to fall into this place where really what I want from the Lord is to be the best pastor, the best teacher, the best minister for him that I can be. And then the Lord says, don't you want to just hang out with me? Don't you just want to have some relationship with me? Well, yeah, yeah. Lord, so that I can be the best pastor, the best teacher, the best whatever minister for you.

And God just says, man, you're more interested in the work. I mean, think about it. If your father had a business.

And your father said, I want you to come and join in with my business. OK, great. And then pretty soon, all you talked to your dad about was the business.

That's the only thing you ever wanted to spend time with your father about. You wouldn't blame your father for saying, look, don't you ever want to relate to me as your father? Not just as another person in the business. So Solomon did his job well.

He was as well or better than anybody else is in job performance as a king of Israel. Yet as his falling away in the end showed, and we'll get to that eventually in First Kings 11, there was something seriously lacking in his spiritual life. Alexander McLaren says this, there is no sign in his biography that he ever had the deep inward devotion of his father.

After the poet psalmist came the prosaic and keen sighted, shrewd man of affairs. So you had the poet psalmist and then you had the sharp businessman. Now, listen, there's obviously nothing wrong with me, a sharp businessman, but Solomon seems satisfied to be that.

And that's why I think that not only with the four and wives in Egypt and the mention of the high places, but I think with the fact that there seems to be something lacking in Solomon's relationship with God that right

here in chapter three, we already see the seeds of destruction that are going to come to full flower in chapter 11. But maybe we should just enjoy it for what it is right now. Here it's God says, verse 13, I've also given you what you have not asked for.

You see, God not only answered Solomon's prayer, he answered it beyond all expectation. Solomon didn't ask for riches and honor or a long life, but God gave him those things also. And then Solomon woke up.

It was a dream, but at the same time, it was a message from God. God answered Solomon's prayer and made him wise and powerful and rich and influential. His reign was glorious for Israel.

Sometimes people like to talk about the golden age of Israel's history. And if they talk about a peak, a pinnacle, the pinnacle of the golden age of Israel is the reign of Solomon. At the same time, his end was tragic.

I'll talk about this a little bit more at the end tonight, but I think in Solomon we find one of the saddest examples of wasted potential that you'll ever find in the Bible. Now, we've just been told that God gave Solomon this tremendous gift of wisdom. So the writer of First Kings is anxious to show us an example of it.

Let me show you an example of how wise Solomon was. And that's where we come to verse 16. Now, two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him.

And one woman said, Oh, my Lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house. And I gave birth while she was in the house. And it happened the third day after I'd given birth that this woman also gave birth and we were together.

No one was with us in the house except two of us in the house. And this woman's son died in the night because she lay on him. So she rose in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while your maidservant slept and laid him in her bosom.

And I laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to nurse my son there, he was dead. But when I had examined him in the morning, indeed, he was not my son whom I had born.

Then the other woman said, No, but the living one is my son and the dead one is your son. And the first woman said, No, the living one is my son. Thus, they spoke before the king.

I think you have to read this and really be surprised by something here. The first thing that really impresses me about this is that Solomon took the time to hear the complaints of two prostitutes. Hey, look, he's a busy man, right? He has a lot of things to do, but it shows he's a gracious man.

He took the time out to listen between an argument that came to him between two prostitutes. Although you will find some people who point out to you that in ancient Hebrew, the word for prostitute or harlot is also the same word for an innkeeper. As well, maybe they weren't prostitutes, but in that day, virtually all the innkeepers were prostitutes, so they were probably prostitutes.

And so they lay out the problem before him. You know, you understand you've heard this story before. Probably, you know, they have the problem with the dead son and each one claims that the living son belongs to them.

And each one says that the dead son belongs to the other. It seemed like an impossible problem to solve. It was certainly the word of one prostitute against the other, and there were no independent witnesses to the events.

So how could you ever solve this? Well, Solomon has the wise solution. Look at it here in verse twenty three. And the king said, this one says, this is my son who lives and your son is the dead one.

And the other says, no, but your son is the dead one and my son is the living one. Then the king said, bring me a sword. So they brought a sword before the king.

You have to say you wouldn't blame everybody in the court of the king right then for being very nervous about this. They're saying Solomon's solution to the problem at first looks foolish, perhaps even dangerous. The wisdom of his approach is only understood when the matter was finally settled.

Can I give just a little illustration from that? Isn't that just how it is with the wisdom of God? I mean, if you were looking at Solomon with this theme and he says, bring me a sword, you'd say, Solomon, you're crazy. What are you going to do? This is dangerous. But afterwards you say, oh, that's brilliant.

You knew exactly what you did. Isn't it that way with the work of God in our life? God begins something. God begins to turn something over, turn something around.

We're like, oh, God, what are you doing? This is crazy. Afterwards it's, oh, yes, Lord, you're so smart. You had it all under control.

Well, it's the same way with Solomon's wisdom in this thing. So he says, bring me a sword. Verse 25, and the king said, divide the living child in two and give the half to one and half to the other.

Then the woman whose son was living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son. And she said, oh, my Lord, give her the living child and by no means kill him. But the other said, let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him.

So the king answered and said, give the first woman the living child and by no means kill him. She is his mother. Solomon knew that the offer to cut the child in two would reveal the true mother.

And he rewarded the mother's love accordingly. You see, Solomon knew that the true parental relationship was proved by love. The true mother would rather have the child live without her than to die with her.

She put the child's welfare above her own. And then you look at it back and say, Solomon, you're brilliant. What a brilliant solution to this problem.

Verse 28, and all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered, and they feared the king, for they saw the wisdom of God was with him to administer to judgment. Judgment, I should say, such a wise decision. You couldn't hide this.

The matter was soon known throughout all the kingdom. And the people of Israel saw that Solomon had both the wisdom and the courage to do the right thing as a leader. This made them hesitant to disobey the law of the king.

You know, when you know that the leaders, that the judges are competent and sharp and wise, you're hesitant to break the law. If you know that the law is corrupt, then you're not so hesitant to break the law.

This made the people fear God and respect the law in this time of ancient Israel.

That's very interesting. I have a great collection of books, this seven volume set called The Legends of the Jews, put together by a guy named Ginsburg. And it's this marvelous collection of rabbinical legends.

And most of them are totally crazy and totally fanciful. And of course, the ancient rabbis loved to make up legends about Solomon. It was just too tantalizing to resist.

And so they used to tell lots of legends about the wisdom of Solomon. And Ginsburg quotes one telling about the time when a demon showed Solomon something that Solomon had never seen before. Something called a Canite, you know, some strange descendant of Cain who the demon brought up out of the ground.

And what made a Canite different was that the Canite had two heads and Solomon had never seen a being with two heads before. And so when the Canite wanted to return again, he could not go back to his dwelling place under the earth. So he married somebody in Israel and he had seven sons.

One of his seven sons also had two heads, just like the Canite. Now, you think, OK, well, just a crazy story from the rabbis. Oh, but they wanted to show Solomon's wisdom in this.

So when the two headed father died, the two headed son said, I want a double portion of the inheritance because I'm two people. And so Solomon was called in to solve this very tricky legal issue. The Sanhedrin couldn't decide it.

So Solomon prayed for wisdom. And you know what he did? He finally poured hot water on one of the heads of the two headed son. Both heads flinched and cried out.

And from this, Solomon said, you're two heads, but you're one person. And therefore, you only get one share of the inheritance. Well, obviously, it's just a crazy story.

But the rabbis couldn't resist making up these kind of stories about Solomon and his wisdom. Well, Solomon's wisdom extended to far more than just legal decisions. He was also very capable when it came to administering his kingdom.

And that's really the topic of chapter four. It says there. So Solomon was king over all Israel.

And these were his officials. Azariah, the son of Zadok, the priest, Elaphoreth and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, scribes, Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahluhad, the recorder, Benaniah, the son of Jehodiah, over the army, Zadok and Abiathar, the priest, Azariah, the son of Nathan, over the officers, Zabod, the son of Nathan, a priest and the king's friend, Ahishar over the household, and Adoniram, the son of Abda, over the labor force. Now, again, just as the story in the previous chapter was an example of the great wisdom of Solomon, so is the organization of his government meant to communicate to us the great wisdom of this man.

Solomon knew how to select, train and empower and then supervise leaders in a wise way. And this was obviously the strength of his kingdom. I mentioned before that many historians will sort of consider the reign of Solomon to be a golden age for the kingdom of Israel.

It was the peak. Never was Israel as politically and militarily and economically and socially as prosperous and as glorious as it was during the reign of Solomon. Well, of course, you know that in any kind of

operation like that, it doesn't just rely on one wise man.

One wise man has to find and train and empower and delegate to other wise people to do the work. And Solomon knew how to do this. I think Solomon, one of his great keys to being an effective king, was that he was a leader of leaders.

You know, no wise leader does it all themselves. They know how to delegate responsibility and authority and get the job done. Solomon's great wisdom made him a leader of other leaders.

And I think it's interesting as you look at these first six verses, it describes the priest and the scribes and the recorder and all these other people. Solomon's government was structured much like that in modern nations today. He had officials who served as ministers or secretaries over their specific areas of responsibility.

You know, he had the Department of this and the Department of that and the Ministry of this and the Ministry of that. He organized it in a very modern way. But this shows us something else wonderful about Solomon's leadership.

Solomon's leadership was organized. He knew that God is a God of design and organization and that things simply operate better and more efficiently when they're organized. This is an important point.

For some people, this is the missing dynamic in their ministry before God. Listen, I know many people in ministry who would be much more fruitful in their ministry if they would organize it. But yet they think that there's something spiritual about their disorganization.

Well, I will say that when you look at this principle of organization throughout the Bible, one of my favorite examples of this is in the book of Numbers. When God wants to transform Israel from being this mob, this scattered bunch of slaves that escaped Egypt, and when he wants to organize them into a nation, the first thing he does is he orders them and he counts them. Very important.

He says, you're going to go into the promised land as a organized group, not as a mob just coming in like a big gang. No, you're going to go in orderly, marching in order. And so he told them to count and organize.

Yet at the same time, he said, don't count the tribe of Levi. You're not going to count everything. And I think this teaches us a good principle about organization is that, yes, God in general, he uses organization.

He uses order. But at the same time, he wants to remind us you can't order everything. You have to be OK with that.

You can't organize everything. You have to leave some of it just up to the hand of God. Well, Solomon seemed to have a good balance on this.

And so he organized the leaders, he organized the ministries, and they seem to operate very well. Now, verse seven. And by the way, I'm not going to read all the way through verse seven through verse 19.

If you look at it, well, I'll tell you exactly what it is. It talks about the governors over Solomon's area over the kingdom. Solomon appointed 12 different governors.

Look at their inverse seven. And Solomon had 12 governors over Israel who provided food for the king in his household. Each one made provision for one month of the year.

And then it goes through and it describes each one of these governors and the territory that they did. I don't feel like bending my tongue around all these difficult to pronounce names. Just take it from me.

Verses seven through 19 describe these 12 governors over these 12 different areas or provinces of Israel. Now, these 12 governors were responsible for the taxation in their individual districts. The districts were not strictly made among the tribal borders, which is interesting.

I mean, if you were going to divide Israel into 12 different groups, wouldn't you just do it by the tribes? Solomon said, no, let's divide it according to the mountains, the lands and the regions. He didn't use a strict tribal separation. And I think you can say something else about Solomon's leadership because of this.

Solomon's leadership was creative. I mean, it took some creativity to say, let's not separate these 12 governors among strictly tribal lines. Let's do it in a more efficient way, according to the where the mountains and the rivers and the regions are.

That will be better for us. And so the 12 governors all over Israel. And then it says in verse seven that each one made provision for one month of the year.

You see, taxes in that day were paid in grain and in livestock. If you were a farmer and it came time for you to pay your taxes, you would pay your taxes by giving one of these local governors, of course, his representative, some of your cattle and some of your grain. And this is how you would pay your taxes for the year.

So the governors collected the cattle and the grain. And once a month, they would be responsible for furnishing the food for Solomon and his court because of this responsibility for taxation. And so here's another principle I want you to get from Solomon's leadership style.

Solomon's leadership was not oppressive. It doesn't seem very much to do one twelfth of the work, does it? I mean, you can handle that, couldn't you? One month out of the year, I could do that. And so you could think each one of the governors of these regions didn't feel that they were being overtaxed or overworked in the expectation of Solomon and his government.

And because of this, Israel was extremely prosperous. Look at verses 20 and 21. It says Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing.

So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. This means that Solomon's authority extended all the way to the Euphrates River.

When it mentions the river there in verse 21, it means the Euphrates River. Listen, that's far greater than the territory of Israel today. That's how far his area of influence.

Now, it doesn't mean that all of that is area was actually the kingdom of Israel. But it means if there were kings from other nations there, that they were tributes. They paid tribute unto Solomon and they were under his leadership all the way to the Euphrates, south all the way through the Sinai to the border of

Egypt.

As I said before, this was a golden age for Israel. Never again did Israel enjoy such broad influence in that area of the world. And that's why we call this a golden age for Israel as a nation.

The population grew. It was a season of prosperity. There was plenty of leisure time and pursuit of good pleasures for the people of Israel.

Now, what else is interesting about this is Solomon reigned over this huge area. But Solomon himself was not a warrior. Solomon himself was not a general.

You remember the contrast between David and Solomon. Solomon's a man of peace. He never used a sword.

He never killed a Goliath. David was a warrior. He was a soldier, but not Solomon.

This peace was achieved by King David, but it was enjoyed by King Solomon. Isn't that interesting? Solomon didn't earn his own accomplishments in this area. They were granted to him because of the warrior father that he had.

Verse 22, if you want to see how prosperous the kingdom was. It says now Solomon's provision for one day was 30 cores of fine flour, 60 cores of meal, 10 fatted oxen, 20 oxen from the pastures and 100 sheep besides deer, gazelles, roebucks and fatted fowl. That is an awful lot for one man to eat.

And I don't know how Solomon could ever do it. No, that's just a joke. Of course, this was for Solomon and not just his household, but all of his royal court.

There are estimates that this much food every day could feed 15,000 to 36,000 people. I mean, as large as Solomon's household was, as we're going to find out in later chapters, Solomon had a pretty big household. As large as his household was, this supplied far more than just his household.

And so all of this idea here of all the different kinds, the idea here is not meant to show that that Solomon was one of these great indulgent leaders who, you know, lived in this great luxury while his people were starving as much as anything. It's just meant to show you the great prosperity of the nation. The nation could provide this for Solomon.

And so everything's great. Not only that, but there was great political stability as well. Look at it here in verse 24.

For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the river, from Tisha, even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the river. And he had peace on every side all around him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and under his fig tree from Dan as far as Beersheba all the days of Solomon.

This idea of each man under his vine and fig tree. This is an interesting proverbial expression that you find many times in the Old Testament. It's in Isaiah chapter 36.

It's in Micah chapter four. It's in Zechariah chapter three. It says when every man lives under his own vine and fig tree, the idea is everybody is prosperous.

Everybody has enough. It means you're safe and you're prosperous. And then it's also stressed here that this was universal across the kingdom of Israel from Dan to Beersheba.

Dan was the northernmost prominent city in Israel. Beersheba was the southernmost prominent city in Israel. And these two defined that from north to south to east to west, it was a prosperous time for Israel.

But look at verse 26. Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots and 12,000 horsemen. And these governors, each man in his month, provided food for King Solomon and for all who came to King Solomon's table.

There was no lack in their supply. They also brought barley and straw to the proper place for the horses and seeds each man according to his charge. Now, if you're very, very familiar with the Old Testament and the law of Moses, verse 26 makes you say danger.

And there's a good reason why it's danger, because turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 17, verse 60. I find it very interesting that back in the book of Deuteronomy. God gives instructions to Israel about having a king.

There's two ways of thinking about the idea of a king in ancient Israel. You're all familiar with this, aren't you? You know it from Sunday mornings when we've been going through the book of First Samuel. You know that when Israel first asked for a king in the book of First Samuel, God said, listen, you don't want me for a king? God felt hurt, as it were.

He felt that he was rejected from being king over them and they wanted a king just by the nations. And so a very interesting question comes up. Did God ever want a king for Israel? Or did he just want to be the king over Israel? Well, I suppose there's no way to absolutely answer the question.

It would be easy to say, yes, God never wanted Israel to have a king. He wanted Yahweh to be the only king for them. But I'm going to suggest a different possibility.

I can't prove it, so I wouldn't be firm on it. But I'll suggest it at least. That God intended one day to provide a king for Israel.

And God's idea was that the first king of Israel should be a little shepherd boy that he would raise up and make the king named David. But because Israel, in their sin and rebellion against God, demanded a king inappropriately, God gave them Saul first and they had to have a Saul before they had to have a David. Now, one of the reasons why I mention this is because 400 years before Saul or David, God tells Israel in the book of Deuteronomy, this is what you need to do when you have a king.

In other words, God knew about this ahead of time. And so that's one of the reasons why I believe that perhaps it wasn't that God never wanted Israel to have a human king. He just wanted to give them one in his timing, not out of their own fleshly desire.

But look at it here, Deuteronomy chapter 17. Let's start at verse 14. When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you and possess it and dwell in it and say, I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me.

You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses one from among your brethren. You shall set as king over you. You may not set a foreigner over you who is not your brother.

Look at verse 16. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, you shall not return that way again. What was one of the instructions that God gave to the kings of Israel? Again, 400 years before there was a king, he said, don't multiply horses unto yourself.

Now, if you look again at verse 17, it says, neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he greatly multiply silver or gold for himself. Now, why did God tell the king of Israel, you shall not multiply horses unto yourself? Listen, it wasn't because God is anti-horse. I'm sure God is delighted with horses.

No, what was the horse in that day? The horse was the most formidable instrument of warfare. A rider on horseback or a man pulled by a chariot, that was the most sophisticated, the most mighty weapon in warfare that was available at the time. When a king wanted to build his military strength, he multiplied horses and chariots unto himself.

What God was saying to the king was, don't put your trust in horses. Don't think that is going to protect you. What's going to protect you is a right relationship with me.

Do you remember what we saw last week in chapters one and two, how God made this amazing promise to David, where he said, if your descendants will trust in me, you will always have one of your descendants to sit on the throne of Israel. I mean, that's an amazing promise. It didn't matter what any of the nations did, how strong they were, how weak they were, what the political situation was.

God said, you honor me and I will always protect your throne. You don't need horses. You don't need chariots.

So God did not say to the king of Israel, you can't have a horse or you can't have several horses. But he says, you cannot multiply horses to yourself. Well, what did Solomon do? What does it say there? Back in First Kings chapter four, it says Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots.

Look, you might say, you know, could the king have 10 horses? Could he have 100 horses? I don't think God wanted to have 40,000 horses. That's definitely multiplying. By the way, in Second Chronicles chapter nine, which is a parallel passage to this, it has the figure 4000 instead of 40,000.

It seems that the smaller number is correct and that the 40,000 is just due to the error of somebody copying the manuscript. It's really no big deal as far as the interpretation of the text is considered. But 4000 is multiplying horses just as much as 40,000 would be.

See what this shows is that Solomon did not take God's word as seriously as he should. And it says here, it reminds us here that Solomon's heart is drifting away. It's not bonded to the Lord in obedience to the Lord the way that it should be.

Now, I want to take another look here at verse 28. It says, they also brought barley and straw to the proper place for the horses and steeds, each man according to his charge. That's the kind of verse that I would normally read and not think too much about and go on to the next verse.

Each man to his charge must mean each man to his duty. Each man had a duty and he was supposed to fulfill it. But, you know, one of my favorite people to read and whenever I'm studying and researching for a text to teach on, I always make it a point.

To read whatever sermons Charles Spurgeon has preached upon a text. And he has a wonderful sermon just upon this verse. Each man according to his charge and Spurgeon's, it deals with this text brilliantly.

He says, listen, each one of us has a duty to fulfill in the kingdom of God. And we should be as diligent to perform it. And we should be expectant that we will be supplied in being able to perform it.

This is what he says. He says in Solomon's court. All his officers had a service to carry out every man according to his charge.

It's exactly so in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are truly his, he has called us to some work in office and he wills us to do that office diligently. We're not to be gentlemen at ease, but men at arms, not lazy, but laborers, not glittering spangles, but burning and shining lights.

That's flowery language from Spurgeon. But I think it's a very, very good point here. The idea here is that everybody has a duty that they're supposed to do for the kingdom of God.

And I tell you, sometimes Spurgeon just really rises to amazingly high points in the sermon. He concluded the message on a very high note. I mean, you can just see him almost preaching this.

He says everything for Jesus, the glorious Solomon of our hearts, the beloved of our souls, life for Jesus, death for Jesus, time for Jesus, eternity for Jesus, hand and heart for Jesus, brain and tongue for Jesus, night and day for Jesus, sickness or health for Jesus, honor or dishonor for Jesus, shame or glory for Jesus, everything for Jesus, every man according to his charge. And he says, so may it be. Amen.

Well, I don't know if I could ever preach like Spurgeon, especially getting so much out of the last few words of a verse, not even the verse itself, but just the last few words of a verse. But you have to say it's a stirring idea here. Every man under Solomon was diligent to perform his duty.

They were aware I am serving a great king, and so I must fulfill my duty. I wonder if we think of it the same way in our service of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, there is no small job before a great king.

If it's a great king that you're serving, then the toilets of the great king should be cleaned immaculate. Then the floors and everything should be good for the great king. The smallest detail deserves the most wonderful attention.

Every man to his charge, every man fulfilling his duty. It was this way in the days of Solomon. Well, as Jesus said, one greater than Solomon is he.

And so he deserves us to fulfill our duty there as well. Well, verse twenty nine begins to describe the great wisdom of Solomon again. It says, and God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore.

Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled all the wisdom of the men of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan, the Ezraite, the Haman, the Talaton, the Darda, the sons of Mahal and all his fame in all the surrounding nations. You see, in the glory years of Solomon's kingdom, he used the great wisdom that God gave him.

And I have to say, I hate to do it because we're just glorying in this wonderful golden age of Israel in the reign of Solomon. But I have to tell you a little bit about the end of the story, that Solomon did not always use this wisdom that God gave him. When he used it, Israel was at its glory.

But when Solomon began to turn from God and when he refused to use the wisdom that God gave him, it began the downfall of Israel. But at this time, it says that he was famous in all the surrounding nations. Solomon became a prominent and a famous man, even among kings.

I want you to turn back to Deuteronomy just for a second here. Deuteronomy, chapter 28, verse one. In many ways, the reign of Solomon is a fulfillment of these blessings described in Deuteronomy, chapter 28, verse one.

It says now it shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord, your God, to observe carefully all his commandments, which I command you today, that the Lord, your God, will set you high above all the nations of the earth and then go down to verse 10. Then all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord and they shall be afraid of you. Well, this is exactly what God was doing in the days of Solomon.

In the early years of his reign, he was obedient. The nation was blessed because of the godly heritage that David had passed on to it. It was a blessed time in Israel and God was lifting Israel up among the nations so that the other nations could see what God would do with an obedient Israel.

You know, as you go back under the old covenant and you start to take a look at what God did in Israel, you see that God's basic plan was to say, if you obey me, I will bless you so much that all the nations will know that it's only God that could bless you this much. Then God said, Israel, if you disobey me, I will curse you. So that such calamity will fall upon you as a people, that people will know you must be the people of God because no other people could have such calamity and still survive unless God had chosen them.

Well, they enjoyed the good part of this dynamic of this covenant under the reign of Solomon. Now, let's just take a look now. Verse 32 to the end of the chapter, it says he spoke 3000 proverbs and his songs were 1005.

He also spoke of trees from the cedar tree of Lebanon, even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall. He spoke also of the animals, of birds, of creeping things and of fish and men of all nations from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Well, Solomon's great wisdom is divinely inspired wisdom.

In fact, it makes up a considerable portion of the Book of Proverbs, as you know. And he also composed many songs. Although I have to say.

It says that David composed songs. Solomon composed songs. And there's a difference, isn't there? David has one of the most precious titles in the scriptures.

2nd Samuel, chapter 23, verse one calls him the sweet psalmist of Israel. Solomon was a good songwriter. David was the sweet psalmist of Israel.

But, of course, Solomon was also an intellectual giant because he spoke of trees and from the cedar tree of animals, of birds, of creeping things and of fish. Solomon's wisdom not only applied to understanding life and human problems, but also to understanding the world around him. He had a divinely gifted intellect and ability to understand.

And so he was an amazing man, an amazing man of science, an amazing man of wisdom. Let me share with you one more story from the ancient rabbis about how Solomon was so wise that even the animals brought their disputes to him. The rabbis say that one day a man walked in a field on a very hot day and he had a cool jug of milk when he came upon a serpent who was dying of thirst.

The serpent asked the man for some of the milk, but the man refused. Finally, the serpent promised to show the man some hidden treasure if he gave him some of the milk. And so the man said, OK, great, I'll give you the milk.

So the serpent survived. And when they went to the place of the hidden treasure, the man moved the rock to uncover the treasure. And he was about to take it when the serpent pounced upon him and coiled around his neck.

The man protested, he said, this is unfair. But the serpent insisted, you will never take my treasure. And the man said, well, let's take the case to Solomon.

And the serpent agreed. So they went back to Solomon and the serpent was still coiled around the man's neck. Solomon asked the serpent what he wanted.

And the serpent said, I want to kill this man because the scriptures command it. When they say I will bruise the heel of man. Solomon said, well, first, let go of the man.

Because any two parties in a legal standing, they have to have equal standing. So it's not fair for you to be coiled around his neck while we're in this court of law. So the serpent uncoiled himself and went down to the floor.

Solomon again asked him what he wanted. And the serpent said, I want to kill the man based on the verse. You shall bruise the heel of man.

Then Solomon turned to the man and he said to you, God's command is to crush the head of the serpent. So do it. And the man crushed the head of the serpent.

Well, again, just a funny story from the rabbis. But what we have from the scriptures is of the great, tremendous wisdom of Solomon, which he asked for. And God gave him and he was a great king.

What he was not was a great man of God. Now, one of the most interesting and tragic things in the Bible are the stories of lost potential. Of people who had great potential to serve God and to be used in them, but they never fulfilled their potential.

I used to think in my mind that the ultimate story of lost or failed potential was Samson. And that's a good one, isn't it? This is a man with great potential. But I look at it now and I wonder if not the greatest story of failed or disappointed, however you want to say it, unfulfilled potential.

If it's not Solomon, if he would have only walked in the wisdom that God gave him and that he did walk in in his early years, if he would have only continued to walk in that. Then he would have had a more glorious reign than David. But this man, this man who started out so wise by the end of his reign, we're going to see it when we get to chapter 11.

He becomes so foolish that he actually sets Israel on a very bad course that they're going to pay for for hundreds of years. It shows us something, right? It shows us that whatever blessings, whatever gifts,

whatever things that we have from the Lord today, we should thank the Lord for them and we should serve him well. But we should always recognize that we need to fulfill the gifts and the potential that God has given us.

As Spurgeon might say it, every man to his duty. Every man fulfill his charge. Nothing more.

You don't have to fulfill Solomon's potential because you don't have Solomon's potential. You just have to fulfill your potential. You don't have to run Solomon's race or Paul's race or King David's race.

You need to run your race and fulfill your potential before the Lord. It's something worthy for us to consider maybe before we lay our head in the pillow tonight. Lord, am I really fulfilling what you've given me to do? And maybe you are.

I hope that I am, but perhaps not. I'm just saying we should not just assume it to be so. We should think soberly over this.

Lord, am I really fulfilling the potential that you've given me to serve you and to live for you? Solomon didn't. I hope that we do. Let's pray.

Thank you, Lord, that you show us so much through these amazing examples in your word. And we thank you that you could give such wisdom to a man like Solomon. Such wisdom that he could be so, Lord, used of you to lift up Israel and to do such a great job as king.

So, Lord, we want to receive everything good that we see in Solomon. But at the same time, we long for something more. We long for the reality of close relationship with you.

And we also long, Lord, that whatever potential we have to serve you and to live for your glory, that it would be fulfilled. That we would not only start the race that you've given us well, but that we would finish well. Help us to do it, Lord, by your grace and for your glory in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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