

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

SAY: “In our last session, we looked at Caleb and his unwavering faith. Today we look at Solomon and his unfailing wisdom.” Invite members to turn to **page 3** in the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review session titles.

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture (**PSG, p. 92**) as you introduce **Question #1: If you could be the leading expert in any field, what would it be?**

OPTION: Call for several volunteers to use their smart phones to look up the definitions or information about the following words: *quixotic, zephyr, vociferous, vituperate, protean, penurious, nadir, hegemony, fatuous, execrable, epistolary, equanimity*. Ask for a show of hands for those who already know more than half of these words. **Ask:** What impact will the knowledge of these new words have on your week?

SESSION 2

SOLOMON: UNFAILING WISDOM



The Point

Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.

The Bible Meets Life

We do not lack knowledge; in fact, we are overwhelmed with knowledge. We may not have it stored in our heads, but we have

easy access with just a click of the mouse. What we lack is understanding of the best way to use that knowledge—and that calls for wisdom. Because God is the ultimate source of everything we can know, wisdom begins by looking to Him. As Solomon wrote, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10).

The Passages

1 Kings 3:3-14; 4:29-34

The Setting

As King David’s death approached, a power struggle arose concerning who would become the next king. His son Adonijah set himself up to succeed his father as king. Bathsheba, David’s wife, appealed to David to name their son Solomon to be the next king. The prophet Nathan joined her in intervening on Solomon’s behalf, and David granted their request. As David neared death, he gave final instructions to Solomon, urging him to live in God’s ways, keeping His law. Following David’s death, the Lord appeared to Solomon.

1 Kings 3:3-9

3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

4 And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

6 And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

8 And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

KEY WORDS:

high places (3:3)—Elevated sites that had been Canaanite places of worship. God had directed the Israelites to destroy the high places (Num. 33:52), but they had not done so, often worshiping there instead.

a little child (3:7)—The Hebrew word was used of newborn infants, little boys, and males of marriageable age. It does not specify a definite age and likely sometimes has the sense of immaturity.

Pray for wisdom and discernment.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 93)**. Highlight the author's explanation of how the Internet helps us gain knowledge, but not necessarily wisdom.

Reinforce the importance of living with wisdom by reading **The Point** on page 100 (**PSG, p. 93**): **Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.**

PRAY: Ask for God's Holy Spirit to lead us into wisdom. Thank Him for the example of Solomon's unfailing wisdom.

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Kings 3:3-9



10 minutes

GUIDE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 100.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 3:3-9.

LEADER PACK: Direct the group's attention to **Item 8: People & Places** to give context for Jerusalem's location.



GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** and **DIGGING DEEPER (PSG, p. 95)** to explain the two interpretations associated with Solomon's sacrifice at the "high places."

SUMMARIZE: The transition of government from David to Solomon was a complicated one (**PSG, pp. 95-96**).

Adonijah was aggressively campaigning to succeed his father before David was even dead.

(Continued on next page.)

1 ▶ **Verse 3.** Solomon demonstrated his love for God by living according to the **statutes** David had followed—God's commandments. The phrase **only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places** is open to two interpretations.

1. The word *only* places a limitation on Solomon's devotion to God. That is, worshiping on high places was not proper.
2. Solomon *sacrificed ... in high places* because the temple had not yet been built. Sacrificing on the high places went against the law, but the writer of 1 Kings implied that Solomon and the people did so "because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days" (see 1 Kings 3:2).

Verse 4. Solomon went to Gibeon to sacrifice. The tabernacle the Israelites had constructed in the wilderness and had brought into Canaan was in Gibeon. With the bronze altar also placed there, Gibeon was the **great high place**. Solomon offered **a thousand burnt offerings** on the bronze altar at Gibeon. Solomon's numerous sacrifices likely represented his petition that God bless his reign. ◀

Verse 5. In 2 Samuel 7:8-16, God made a covenant with David in which He promised to establish the kingdom of David's descendant. David's house and kingdom would extend through the years; God would establish his throne forever. While **in Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream**. In the Old Testament, dreams were one channel of revelation from God, and kings' dreams were especially important.

In his dream, God directed Solomon to ask for a specific blessing. God's offer was a test of Solomon's priorities and a readiness to provide the help he needed.

Verse 6. Solomon began his response to God's offer by affirming the Lord's **great mercy**. The word *mercy* translates a Hebrew word that almost defies definition. It can be translated "goodness," "kindness," or "loving kindness." It is close to the New Testament concept of grace. Such love is *great* in its persistence and extent. Even when David sinned, God had proved to be consistently good and merciful to him.

David's life was characterized by **truth** (faithfulness), **righteousness** (just character and conduct), and **uprightness of heart** (rightness in God's estimation). Solomon was aware that God had been faithful to His covenant by giving David **a son to sit on his throne**.

Verse 7. God had orchestrated Solomon’s ascent to the throne. The king addressed God as **LORD**, acknowledging Him as the covenant God and as sovereign. By addressing Him as **my God**, Solomon stressed his relationship with the Creator of the universe. The king expressed humility by calling himself God’s **servant**, His subject ready to do His bidding.

Solomon modestly called himself **a little child**. Scholars have suggested Solomon’s age at the time of his dream may have been between 12 and 20; most likely, however, he was around 20 years old. Solomon may have used the term to indicate he realized he was utterly unprepared to be king. He did not **know ... how to go out or come in**—how to conduct the people’s affairs.

Verses 8-9. Again acknowledging he was God’s **servant**, Solomon cited the **multitude** of Israelites as one reason he needed God’s help. In light of his inexperience and the huge number of his people, Solomon asked for **an understanding heart**; literally, “a hearing heart.” In Hebrew thought, the heart was the seat of intellect, will, and emotions. Solomon requested that he would recognize and obey God’s leading. In effect, he asked for wisdom to enable him **to judge** God’s people. To **discern between good and bad** probably referred to making sound legal decisions. He would be called on to decide hard, complex cases and would need insight to render right verdicts. He did not have the innate ability to perform such a daunting task, and he asked God to help him.

1 Kings 3:10-14

10 And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

11 And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

Because of the behind-the-scenes work of a prophet named Nathan, and Solomon’s mother, Bathsheba, David named Solomon king (vv. 5-39).

All of this happened when Solomon was very young, somewhere between twelve and twenty.

Talk about pressure! So what does a young man do in this situation, when he knows he is in over his head? What does he do when he knows he is not up to the challenge? Solomon would make many mistakes in his life, but in this moment he absolutely did the right thing: he prayed.

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 96): What’s the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

(Alternate: What can we learn about Solomon’s character from this passage?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we see the Lord’s response to Solomon’s prayer.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Kings 3:10-14



15 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 3:10-14.

DISCUSS: Question #3 (PSG, p. 97): How do we gain and apply wisdom in our daily lives?

GUIDE: Using Bible

Commentary 2, explain Solomon's discernment, how he pleased the Lord, and the Lord's response.

SUMMARIZE: Something about what and how Solomon asked touched the heart of God (PSG, pp. 97-98).

- **The request was made humbly.** *Solomon knew he couldn't muster up the wisdom to do the job he had been tasked to do. So he came to the Lord, in a humble spirit, asking God to do for him what he could not do for himself.*

(Continued on next page.)

13 And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

14 And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.

God give us wisdom.

2 ▶ Verses 10-11. Solomon's request **pleased the Lord**. God commended him because he had **not asked for ... long life, ... riches**, or the destruction of his **enemies**, but had requested **understanding to discern judgment**. To *discern* had the sense of receptiveness to hear God. Solomon wanted to be sensitive to God's leading and to have the necessary insight to render fair judgments in cases brought to him.

Verse 12. God granted Solomon's request. God would make Solomon skillful in administrating the nation's affairs and give him keen perception in reaching decisions. God also would elevate Solomon to unprecedented greatness. Scholars differ as to how to interpret God's statement that **there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee**: some think it refers to the entire human race, while other believe God was speaking just of Israel's kings. ◀

Verse 13. God's response went far beyond what the king could have imagined. Solomon had not asked for **riches, and honour**; however, God would give him both. As long as Solomon lived, no other kingdom's leader would attain Solomon's stature.

Verse 14. God's third and final gift to Solomon would hinge on a condition. If the king would **walk in God's ways, to keep His statutes and ... commandments, as ... David did walk, then** God would **lengthen** [Solomon's] **days**. God's ways were His paths or roads and referred to manner of life. Solomon would need to follow God's guidelines for his life and render faithful service to Him. God's statutes or decrees were what was due Him. His commands were the code of law He had given the Israelites.

1 Kings 4:29-34

29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.

30 And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.

32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

Others benefit when we share God's wisdom.

On awaking, Solomon knew God had encountered him in his dream. The king's response was to worship. He journeyed from Gibeon to Jerusalem, where he made sacrifices to God: burnt offerings and peace offerings. The priests received part of the fellowship offerings, and the remainder of the meat was eaten in a communal meal (3:15).

First Kings 4:1-6 lists Solomon's advisors or court officials. Verses 7-19 detail his provincial or district governors. The latter officials were responsible for taking turns in providing food for Solomon and all who ate with him, and they did so abundantly. The catalogue of "Solomon's provision for one day" demonstrated the magnitude of that task (vv. 22-23). Surrounding territories gave tribute to Solomon, and he ruled an extended area. His large military force ensured that his people lived in peace and "lacked nothing" (vv. 24-28).

- **The request made much of God.** *As Solomon was humbled, the Lord and His power were uplifted.*

- **The request was for the sake of others.** *The entire community—and more—would benefit and be strengthened.*

God granted Solomon's request. Thankfully, He is still a God who delights not only in hearing from His people, but giving them what they need.

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 98): When has God given you more than you asked for?

(Alternate: What makes a request pleasing to God?)

TRANSITION: "The next verses demonstrate how Solomon's wisdom allowed his influence to grow and make an impact on others for God's glory."

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Kings 4:29-34



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 4:29-34.

GUIDE: Use Bible

Commentary **3** on this page and page 107 to explain the extent of Solomon's influence.

SUMMARIZE: Wisdom does not end with the person who receives it. Rather, God gives wisdom for the sake of others. Who benefits when we share God's wisdom? (**PSG**, pp. 99-100):

- Families benefit.
- Churches benefit.
- Communities benefit.

Verse 29. The writer of 1 Kings heaped up words to emphasize God's following through in fulfilling Solomon's request for guidance in ruling Israel. **God gave Solomon wisdom**—administrative skill, shrewdness, and cleverness. He had the practical ability to decide the best course of action. God also gave Solomon **understanding exceeding much**—keen insight that allowed him to solve knotty problems. His incredible **largeness of heart**—was the encyclopedic ability to absorb diverse information. We often see something in Scripture described **as the sand that is on the seashore**, indicating something beyond numbering, an incredible abundance (Jos. 11:4; 1 Sam. 13:5; 2 Sam. 17:11; Ps. 78:27; Jer. 33:22; Heb. 11:12; Rev. 20:8). In Genesis 22:17, God promised Abraham, "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore." In Genesis 32:12, Jacob reminded God of His promise to make Jacob's descendants "like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted."

3 ▶ **Verse 30. Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country.** *The east country* could have referred to Arabia or Babylonia, to areas now known as Syria, and to areas in Babylon. An alternate suggestion is that the reference is to the tribes that lived southeast of the Dead Sea. Solomon's wisdom also exceeded **all the wisdom of Egypt.** Be referring to the *wisdom of Egypt*, the writer meant to indicate the tremendous scope of Egyptian knowledge. The Egyptians were famous for their wisdom, which "extended over the most diverse branches of knowledge, such as geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and astrology."¹ Their knowledge also extended to the areas of medicine and natural science. For Solomon to surpass Egyptian knowledge was no small achievement and occurred because of God's gift to him.

Verse 31. No other person could match Solomon in the area of wisdom. The writer of 1 Kings named four individuals who were renowned for their wisdom: **Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol.** They may have been the same men who were listed as the sons of Zerah and descendants of Judah in 1 Chronicles 2:4-6. Little is known about these men beyond the meanings of their names. *Ethan* means "enduring"; *Heman* means "faithful"; *Chalcol* may mean "sustaining"; and *Darda* may mean "pearl of knowledge" *Mahol* means "place of dancing"; it may be

the name of the father of the three men listed as his *sons* or it may refer to an occupation or an orchestral guild—men who danced as part of worship rituals. The three men listed may have been members of a group dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. All four men apparently were focused on the pursuit of knowledge and were well-known for being wise. Solomon's **fame** for exceptional wisdom **was in all nations** around Israel. ◀

Verse 32. Solomon was a prolific writer, composing **three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.** *Proverbs* were short, pithy statements drawn from experience that gave insight for godly living. *Songs* included psalms of praise, thanksgiving, lament, repentance, and petition and were often used in worship. Some songs imparted wisdom and had a teaching purpose. Solomon has been associated with much of the wisdom literature in Israel. His name became connected to the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). The Book of Psalms includes two songs attributed to him (Pss. 72; 127).

Verse 33. Solomon wrote on a wide variety of subjects. **He spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop,** a small bushy plant. He also wrote about the animal kingdom, which the Hebrews divided into four classes: **beasts, and ... fowl, and ... creeping things, and ... fishes.** Solomon's interests and observations were quite comprehensive.

Verse 34. The writer of 1 Kings highly stressed Solomon's reputation for superior wisdom. As we might say, "The whole town went to hear his speech," the writer emphasized **there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth.** Rulers of territories outside Israel **had heard of** Solomon's great **wisdom** and had sent representatives to listen as he taught. God clearly had done all Solomon asked earlier at Gibeon—and then some.

Some have defined *knowledge* as gathering facts, and *wisdom* as proper application of those facts. Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge. Recipients of God's gift of wisdom are not the only ones who benefit from that gift. When recipients express wisdom, others benefit. Wise people share their wisdom humbly and tactfully, not arrogantly or with a superior attitude. Truly wise people seek others' best interests. Receiving wisdom from God carries the responsibility to help others make wise decisions also, thereby building strong relationships.

1. C. F. Keil, "The Books of the Kings" in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd.) 55.

DISCUSS: Question #5

(PSG, p. 100): **How can we effectively reflect God's wisdom in our culture?**

(Alternate: How does the response to Solomon's wisdom in verse 34 compare with the world's response to the church today?)

OPTION: IN ADVANCE,

print the following verse references on cards (a link to sample cards can be found at BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra): Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 2:6; Proverbs 3:7; Proverbs 3:13; Proverbs 4:6-7; Proverbs 15:33; Proverbs 16:16; Ecclesiastes 2:26.

TIP: Duplicate if necessary to make enough for each group member to have one.

Say: "I'm sharing some of Solomon's wisdom with you even today. Now you can share it with someone else this week." Lead in a time of prayer that God would guide group members to become people who seek after His wisdom and share it with others.

DO: Invite volunteers to share their responses to the activity on **PSG page 100: "Knowledge and Wisdom."**

LIVE IT OUT**5 minutes**

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 101;** see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Emphasize that, as important as it is to gain knowledge, it's more important to have wisdom.

PRAY: "Father, help us to be wise enough to look to You for more wisdom and understanding."

NOTE: Remind group members that **PSG pages 6-9** are there to journal one another's prayer requests.

LIVE IT OUT

What steps can you take to seek out God's wisdom this week? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Read.** True wisdom is found in reading God's Word. Commit yourself to read one chapter from the Book of Proverbs each day this month.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Memorize Proverbs 9:10, a proverb written by Solomon: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."
- ▶ **Meet.** Who is one person whose wisdom you could benefit from? Contact that person and request to meet one on one so that you can learn from his or her insights. Or consider being a mentor to someone who could benefit from the wisdom God has given you.

Yes, knowledge is out there—more than you or I know what to do with. But while knowledge might increase our prominence or reputation, wisdom is to be more treasured than gold. Humbly pray for wisdom and trust the God who is generous in answering.

BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Solomonic gate leading into Megiddo.

The coronation of Solomon marked a milestone in Israel's history. Sovereignty over all twelve tribes was passed peacefully at the death of the king. It would never happen again.

Solomon's ascension to the throne had no basis other than he was God's choice to rule the kingdom. In the steps Solomon took to secure his throne, he demonstrated wisdom and leadership. It demonstrated that at this point in his life, he acted decisively and judiciously.

Solomon aggressively pursued public works projects such

as construction of his palace and Yahweh's temple. The infrastructure of Israel improved. The temple would serve as the heart of Israel's religion for centuries. Solomon established foreign political alliances that resulted in peaceful relations with Israel's neighbors.

The early years of the reign of Solomon were known as Israel's "Golden Age." It was a time of peace and prosperity. Cultural achievements expanded. The king gained a reputation for his proverbs. In part this was due to his patronage of wisdom literature. Formal education and literary progress produced works such as those recorded in the biblical Books of Proverbs and Song of Songs.

To the elderly especially, the transformation of Israel must have seemed phenomenal. To the young, it signified Israel's rightful place in the world.

The excerpt above is from the article "Solomon in All His Splendor" (Summer 2007), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we have not only the knowledge we need, but the wisdom to live according to His design.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the **Groups Ministry blog.**

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry