GOD GAVE WISDOM TO SOLOMON

1 Kings 3:1-7:51

Key Verses: 3:11-12

“So God said to him, ‘Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.’”

In chapters 1-2 we saw how God established Solomon as king and how God established the kingdom under his reign. Chapters 3-7 are about the early reign of Solomon. It was a great success and the kingdom was blessed because Solomon ruled with the wisdom of God. We all want this kind of success and to be a blessing. It is possible when we have the wisdom of God. There are two kinds of wisdom: worldly wisdom and divine wisdom. Worldly wisdom can be obtained through education, books, experience, or googling the Internet. Usually, worldly wisdom makes man proud; sometimes it hurts people. Divine wisdom cannot be gained by human effort. It comes from God. It is life-giving. It helps man to be humble and reveals God’s glory. With divine wisdom we can shepherd others, even our children. We can manage a family, a fellowship, a church, a community, even a nation. How can we acquire divine wisdom? Let’s learn from today’s study.

First, Solomon shows his love for the Lord (3:1-4). Look at verse 1. “Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem.” At that time, Egypt was a superpower nation. It was very hard to make an alliance with Egypt, and even harder to marry Pharaoh’s daughter. But Solomon did both. This means that Israel was recognized as a significant nation in the world. However, Solomon’s marriage to a foreign woman was against God’s command (Dt 7:3,4). Solomon might have thought that he could handle her, but it was the seed of disaster. Solomon still had humanistic elements in his heart, though he had removed them from his kingdom. A huge dam can be destroyed by a small hole. In the same way, man can fall into disaster through one small element of humanism. So we should not compromise even in small things.

At that time, there was no center for the spiritual life of the people because the temple had not yet been built (2). According to God’s command, the Israelites had to make burnt offerings at the place God designated to put his Name (Lev 12:5). This was Jerusalem. But they did not follow this command and were sacrificing at the high places. Spiritually speaking, building the temple was most important and urgent for the nation of Israel.

Look at verse 3. “Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.” Though the author does not excuse Solomon for compromising with the high places, in essence Solomon loved the Lord with all his heart and walked in the footsteps of David in obedience to God. Solomon went up to Gibeon, the most important high place, where the tabernacle and altar that Moses had made were still kept (4; 1 Ch 21:29). There, Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on the altar. Solomon spent a lot of money and engaged the help of many people. Solomon did this deliberately at the beginning of his reign. He showed his love for God and sought God’s favor and blessing first.

Second, Solomon asks for wisdom (5-9). God was not legalistic toward Solomon. God was moved by Solomon’s expression of love for him. In 1 Samuel 2:30b, God had said, “Those who honor me I will honor and those who despise me will be disdained.” When Solomon honored God, God wanted to honor him. So he appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you” (5). God was ready to give Solomon whatever he asked of him. Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Our problem is that there are so many things to ask. What would you ask for? Someone may say, “Please solve my mortgage problem.” Many people first think of asking for money, believing that they can do all things with money. We can go anywhere in the world with money, except to the kingdom of God. We can buy all things with money, except happiness, righteousness, truth, a happy family, true honor, and good health. What should we ask for as children of God? Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:9-10).

How did Solomon respond? Look at verse 6. Solomon remembered God’s grace upon his father David. He knew that he became a king, not because of his own merit, but because of God’s grace toward David. Likewise, we receive God’s grace through Jesus Christ, who forgave all our sins. So we have to remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must also remember God’s grace to us through forefathers. We should realize that God has blessed us through his servants who have gone before us. When we recognize God’s history, the stream of God’s blessing will continue.

Furthermore, Solomon recognized that it was God who made him king. In verse 7a, he said, “Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king….” Solomon recognized God’s sovereignty over his life, in contrast to Adonijah. Solomon also recognized his weakness, that he was only a little child who did not know how to carry out his duties (7b). He was humble. God gives grace to the humble (Pr 3:34). Solomon said, “Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number” (8). Solomon respected the people he was called to govern as God’s people. He knew that they were not his subjects, but God’s subjects, and truly respected their greatness in God. David had the same attitude. When God’s people were hiding themselves before Goliath, he did not see them as cowards, but as the army of the living God (1 Sam 17:26). Solomon was aware of God’s destiny upon the people of Israel and upon himself. Solomon wanted to lead God’s people in a right way to fulfill God’s purpose.

Solomon asked, “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” (9) Solomon knew that only God could lead the Israelites in the right way. As God’s servant, he had a strong sense of responsibility and compassion for them. But he did not know what to do. So he asked for a discerning heart to govern them and to distinguish between right and wrong. Solomon makes a great contrast with Adonijah. Adonijah asked for Abishag the Shunammite to be given to him as his wife (2:17). He asked about marriage, and his motive was not pure. He was killed. But Solomon asked for a discerning heart to govern his people well.

Solomon knew that to distinguish between right and wrong is very important in establishing a lasting kingdom. Yet it is not easy. There are so many criteria to consider. Every generation has its own standard of what is right and wrong. In the eighteenth century, people valued human reason. But human reason cannot be the criteria with which to distinguish right and wrong. In the nineteenth century, people thought that science was the answer. They expected a utopia without diseases or death or destruction through scientific advancement. But this turned out to be a rosy dream without roots in reality. In our times, postmodern thought denies that there is any absolute right or wrong. Any action can be justified in some aspect, even those of homosexuals, adulterers, or tyrants. In this postmodern era people call good evil and evil good. When we hear the words, “wicked,” or “sick” used by young people we hardly know what it means. We all need wisdom to discern what is right and wrong. Where can we find this wisdom? Only God’s word gives us the absolute truth about what is right and wrong.

When God created the garden of Eden he commanded man very clearly, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen 2:16,17). To obey God’s command was good. To disobey God’s command was evil. God set the standard of good and evil. But the serpent deceived man saying, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4,5). The woman was deceived by the serpent and disobeyed God. Then mankind lost the absolute criteria with which to judge good and evil and began to develop his own standard. Man has been in confusion ever since. St. Augustine had an agony about the existence of evil. The Lord God created the world good. Then how did evil come into being? Through his deep meditation he realized that leaving God, who is absolutely good, is evil. Evil is the absence of God. In other words, to be close to God is good and to be away from God is evil because God is the standard of good. That is why the book of Kings judges each one as good or evil “in the eyes of the Lord” (1 Ki 14:8; 15:5,11,26). When we obey God’s word, that is good. When we disobey his word and go away from God, that is evil. Solomon wanted to follow God’s standard of good and evil. He acknowledged that the Lord God is the only true judge between right and wrong. So we must seek God first. Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” True wisdom and understanding come from God. When we love and obey the Lord from our hearts, God will be pleased and grant us wisdom and understanding. Then we will prosper in all we do. However, if we do not love and obey the Lord, we become fools, though we claim to be wise (Ro 1:21).

We have many things to ask from the Lord such as long life, wealth and the destruction of enemies. These days many people pray for a good job and an improved economy. Many pray for a suitable marriage partner. Those who pray are much better than those who just look around and hope something will happen. Some pray for good health. We need these things. However, we must first ask for what God wants us to have. God really wants to give us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom (Eph 1:17). Jesus said in Luke 11:13, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” God is very eager to give us the Holy Spirit. When God gives the Holy Spirit he gives us sparkling wisdom by which we can help God’s flock in the best way. Sometimes, though we eagerly desire to raise disciples, we lack wisdom to help them. James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” God does not rebuke us, but gives us wisdom by his grace.

Third, God gives Solomon wisdom (10-15). How did God respond to Solomon’s prayer? Look at verse 10. “The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.” Let’s read verses 11-12. “So God said to him, ‘Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.” Moreover God wanted to give him what he had not asked for: both riches and honor. As long as he walked in God’s ways and obeyed God’s commands, God would also give him a long life. Here we learn two things.

In the first place, there is prayer that pleases God. This prayer is according to God’s will. 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence that we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” When we pray according to God’s will he hears and answers. Sometimes we do not receive because we do not ask. Sometimes we ask but do not receive because we ask with wrong motives, that we may spend what we get on our pleasures (Jam 4:2b,3). George Mueller received God’s answer to his prayer 50,000 times. He said the secret of receiving God’s answer was a pure motive. Prayer should not be selfish, but according to God’s will. Then God surely answers our prayer. We must ask according to God’s will.

In the second place, God answers our prayer more abundantly than we ask. God is our Father. When we really ask according to his will, he provides everything generously according to our need. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” When our prayer pleases God, God will give us “all these things” as well. Solomon had asked for a discerning heart to govern God’s people. God gave him that and more. God gave him riches, honor, and a promise of long life if he kept God’s commands. If children love and please their father, their father wants to give them everything they want, as long as it is good for them. But if a child does not care about his father and just wants to use his father for selfish gain, the father may give what the child asks and let him go his own way, like the prodigal son. When we please God and love God, God will give us everything we need.

Look at verse 15a. “Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.” Though it was a dream, God spoke to him. God accepted Solomon’s prayer and began to answer. Then Solomon returned to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant. There he sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court. When the king was right with God by personally meeting him, and his prayer was answered, the kingdom was off to a good start. There was good cause for all to rejoice.

Fourth, Solomon’s wise judgment (3:16-28). The wisdom that Solomon received from the Lord was well revealed through his judgments. One day two prostitutes came before the king with a problem. They were fighting over the identity of a baby boy, each claiming the child was hers. If this had happened in our times, it would have been easy to solve with DNA testing. But in those times this knowledge was not available. It seemed impossible to distinguish between right and wrong and to make a right judgment. In fact, this was a test case for the king, to see if he could give a right judgment and show himself to be a wise king.

Solomon said, “Bring me a sword.” These words must have made the atmosphere tense. It appeared that someone would die. Then Solomon gave this order: “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other” (25). The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!” But the other said, “Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!” The real mother gave up her claim to her son in order to spare his life. The other woman revealed her envy and cold heart. With God’s wisdom, Solomon penetrated the deception and discerned the real truth of the matter before him. As a result, evil was exposed, good was rewarded and justice was upheld. A son could grow up with his mother, and a wicked woman could have a chance to repent. This is the effect of God’s wisdom.

True wisdom is the ability to see through to the essence of a matter. These days there are many people who say they are okay and doing well. But the Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. No matter who he or she may be, each person has a sin problem that is destroying their lives, causing great misery which will lead to God’s judgment and eternal condemnation. Each person needs the forgiveness of sins and the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts to solve their sin problem and to find true freedom and peace. So we must see people with God’s wisdom and gospel faith. It is easy to judge based on the outer appearance of things such as wealth, honor, or good morals. But we should see through these things. Each person needs the gospel. Each person must repent before God and receive the grace of salvation. When we see with God’s wisdom, when we have God’s mind, we can judge rightly and help people properly.

Solomon’s wisdom through one event had a great impact on the nation Israel. Verse 28 says, “When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.” When the king was right with God, the people respected him as God’s servant. They could expect justice and righteousness in their land. They were ready to follow his instructions. The way was prepared for the building of the nation and the temple.

In chapter 4:1-19, we can find Solomon’s wisdom in making his cabinet. This chapter also shows how the kingdom prospered, governed by God’s wisdom. Solomon was a man of peace and peace characterized his reign. In this respect, he makes a great contrast with his father David, a man of war. The peace and prosperity of Solomon’s reign are described in 4:20-28. Let’s read 4:20. “The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.” Let’s read 4:25. “During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.”  Solomon’s reign makes a great contrast with David’s. David was a man of war. But Solomon was a man of peace. Solomon’s matchless wisdom is described in 4:29-35. It was greater than the wisdom of all people in the world. God’s wisdom is superior to any worldly wisdom.

Chapters 5-7 explain that Solomon built the temple of the Lord. This was what God really wanted him to do and what Israel needed most. Solomon dedicated his whole heart to this task. Solomon used his God-given wisdom to build the Lord’s temple. Solomon used his wisdom, not for himself, but for the good of his people and for the glory of God. Solomon was a good steward of the wisdom God gave him.

Today we learned that God was pleased to give Solomon wisdom to be a good king for his people Israel. Especially Solomon could distinguish between right and wrong, and between good and evil and guide his people in a right way. In these relativistic times, our nation needs spiritual leaders who can distinguish between good and evil and lead God’s flock to God and his purpose and his kingdom. Let’s ask God for wisdom to be shepherds for the young people of our times.