God Provides a Wise King

1 Kings; Ecclesiastes

Memory Verses

“May all the peoples of the earth know that the Lord is God. There is no other! Be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord our God to walk in his statutes and to keep his commands, as it is today.”

—1 Kings 8:60-61
A Son Requests Wisdom

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God gives His people wisdom from above.

MAIN PASSAGES: 1 Kings 3:5-15, 23-28

WHAT DO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE HAVE IN COMMON?

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<td>John Adams</td>
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<td>Jay Leno</td>
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Group Time

Point 1: The Request for Wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-9)

5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, “Ask. What should I give you?”

6 And Solomon replied, “You have shown great and faithful love to your servant, my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, righteousness, and integrity. You have continued this great and faithful love for him by giving him a son to sit on his throne, as it is today.

7 “Lord my God, you have now made your servant king in my father David’s place. Yet I am just a youth with no experience in leadership. 8 Your servant is among your people you have chosen, a people too many to be numbered or counted. 9 So give your servant a receptive heart to judge your people and to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of yours?”

In the preamble to his answer to God’s question, Solomon acknowledged that the only reason he was king in the first place was because God was faithful to the promise He had made to his father, David. It took humility for Solomon to admit that he was in the position he was in because of his father’s faithfulness and not because of his own abilities. Furthermore, he acknowledged that the task of leadership in front of him was too large for him.

Why is humility necessary to request wisdom from the Lord?

In humility before the Lord, Solomon asked for a receptive heart to lead his people well and discern between good and evil. Solomon was asking for what would position him to succeed as Israel’s king over a long reign: God-given wisdom that would guide him through any situation he faced. He was also asking for a mind-set willing to accept direction and correction from the Lord. With so many glamorous options before him, Solomon chose wisdom to be a blessing to his people as king.

What is your first step when faced with a new responsibility?

Panic  Plan  Pray for Wisdom
Point 2: The Gift of Wisdom (1 Kings 3:10-15)

10 Now it pleased the Lord that Solomon had requested this. 11 So God said to him, “Because you have requested this and did not ask for long life or riches for yourself, or the death of your enemies, but you asked discernment for yourself to administer justice, 12 I will therefore do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has never been anyone like you before and never will be again. 13 In addition, I will give you what you did not ask for: both riches and honor, so that no king will be your equal during your entire life. 14 If you walk in my ways and keep my statutes and commands just as your father David did, I will give you a long life.”

15 Then Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream. He went to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant, and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he held a feast for all his servants.

Solomon received instant feedback from the Lord that He was pleased with Solomon’s request. But we cannot detach Solomon’s request from his motive behind that request. Had Solomon asked for long life, riches, or the death of his enemies, these would have indicated that Solomon’s chief preoccupation was himself. Instead, Solomon sought wisdom so he could administer justice for God’s people. Solomon cared more about God’s people than himself. That is the heart posture of a person in whom God delights.

God Is Omniscient: Scripture teaches that God is ________________. His knowledge is complete, and as He is outside of time, He has known from all ______________ whatever will come to pass. In response to God’s omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as ______________ and ______________.

God answered Solomon’s request—He made him the wisest human being in all of history. And more than that, God was so pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom that He also blessed Him with honor, riches, and the potential for a long life. Giving generously to His children is at the center of God’s heart. He is our loving Father who delights in giving good gifts to His children (Matt. 7:11).

Why do you think God wants us to ask Him for wisdom instead of just giving it to us?
Point 3: The Exercise of Wisdom (1 Kings 3:23-28)

The king replied, “This woman says, ‘This is my son who is alive, and your son is dead,’ but that woman says, ‘No, your son is dead, and my son is alive.’” The king continued, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought the sword to the king. And the king said, “Cut the living boy in two and give half to one and half to the other.”

The woman whose son was alive spoke to the king because she felt great compassion for her son. “My lord, give her the living baby,” she said, “but please don’t have him killed!” But the other one said, “He will not be mine or yours. Cut him in two!”

The king responded, “Give the living baby to the first woman, and don’t kill him. She is his mother.” All Israel heard about the judgment the king had given, and they stood in awe of the king because they saw that God’s wisdom was in him to carry out justice.

It says much about God’s heart for the marginalized that this first recorded test of Solomon’s wisdom was not for the benefit of a wealthy prince but to settle a dispute between two prostitutes who had no standing in society. Solomon was able to look past the degrading label of “prostitute” to see that this situation involved a mother. In calling for the living child to be cut in half, Solomon was counting on the true mother’s maternal instinct to win out over greed and deception. When she displayed her selfless compassion for her child, he was able to give her justice along with her son.

Voices from the Church

“From the beginning of Scripture to the end, we see a God who longs for justice and righteousness in the world and who calls us as his people to join him in seeking it. And that’s part of what it means to be God’s people.”

—Kristen Deede Johnson

How have you seen God-given wisdom bless His people and the world?

While Solomon’s wise judgment in this case certainly established his credibility to lead, his people rightly understood that Solomon’s wisdom came not from himself but from God (1 Kings 3:28). A person employing God-given wisdom never draws selfish attention to himself or herself. Instead, God-given wisdom informs the ultimate purpose of that wisdom: to bring glory to God.

What challenges will we face in using God-given wisdom to bring glory to God?
My Mission

Because we have received God’s perfect wisdom in Christ Jesus, we depend on His wisdom from above to live as a testimony to our all-wise God.

• What is one area of your life in which you need to seek God’s wisdom right now? Pray to God for His wisdom.
• In what ways can your group use wisdom to seek justice for the marginalized this week?
• How will you live and speak this week so that others may exalt Jesus?

Voices from Church History

“Let the wise man display his wisdom, not by [mere] words, but through good deeds.”
–Clement of Rome (c. 30-100)
Daily Study

Day 1: Read 1 Kings 2:1-12

David’s dying words to Solomon signal a transitional point in the life of Israel: David’s reign primarily being characterized by war and Solomon’s as an era of peace. First, David’s words echo the covenantal charges given to Joshua (Josh. 1:6-9) as well as the description of the ideal man in Psalm 1: Be strong and courageous (1 Kings 2:2); honor your obligations to the Lord and walk in His ways (v. 3); walk faithfully before God and there will always be one of your descendants on the throne of Israel (v. 4).

Second, David trusted Solomon to exercise wisdom in some matters of justice. These were timely and precarious matters pertaining to individuals who negatively affected David’s reign and public influence, and the beginning of Solomon’s reign seemed to be the appropriate occasion to address them. Of note in this passage is the way David counseled Solomon to deal in wisdom with his enemies.

Interestingly enough, even after Solomon executed David’s enemies, God would commend Solomon for his request for “a receptive heart to judge your people and to discern between good and evil” (3:9), a request where avenging his personal enemies was not a first priority but second to serving the good of his people (3:11). Accordingly, wisdom is not opposed to justice, and true justice is a display of God’s wisdom.

When has someone trusted you to act with wisdom concerning something important? Why should we not pit wisdom and justice against one another?
Day 2: Read 1 Kings 2:13-25

In this section, we see Adonijah, the eldest son of David, make a selfish and transparent bid for power by asking for a woman associated with David to be given to him as a wife. In the ancient world, a new king’s power was validated when he took the wives of the former king. Adonijah’s request was not merely to obtain a spouse but a brazen attempt to grasp the throne. We might miss this nuance, but Solomon didn’t. He saw through this power play, and Adonijah paid for it with his life.

In contrast to Adonijah’s self-centered actions, Solomon would not ask God for anything self-serving when God invited him to ask for anything he desired (3:5). Eventually Solomon would be led astray by his own wives later on in his reign, as he struggled to use his wisdom (see 1 Kings 11:1), but here at the outset, he was more interested in displaying God’s justice to the people than he was serving his own interests.

What does the world see when they look at your life? Do you display your own ambitions or do you display God’s character?

Day 3: Read 1 Kings 3:1-9

Although the main point of this passage is Solomon’s request for wisdom, we also see some early warning signs of the trouble to come. Verse 1 notes that Solomon made an alliance with Egypt. Egypt! The site of four hundred years of bondage for God’s people. God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, described Egypt as “that splintered reed of a staff that will pierce the hand of anyone who grabs it and leans on it” (Isa. 36:6).

Verse 1 goes on to say that Solomon sealed the alliance by marrying Pharaoh’s daughter. While forming alliances through marriage has long been a common practice among world powers, God explicitly forbade His people from marrying foreigners because of the danger of apostasy (Deut. 7:3-4). It wasn’t about mixing races but mixing faiths. This was the first of many foreign wives who would ultimately lead Solomon into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1-4). How sad that Solomon didn’t ask for wisdom before he made these two mistakes, although, as we will see, even God’s gift of wisdom was not enough to overcome Solomon’s sin.

When do you typically seek God’s wisdom: before or after you’ve already made up your mind? Why?
Day 4: Read 1 Kings 3:10-15

Solomon did two things in verse 15 that are important for all of us to remember. First, he acknowledged the One who was in authority above him by leaving Gibeon and offering sacrifices to the Lord in Jerusalem. Then he honored those he was in authority over by holding a feast for his servants. Every leader has 360 degrees of accountability. Even the mightiest earthly ruler must acknowledge that his or her authority is given by God (Rom. 13:1) and that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority. In Him, all things hold together (Col. 1:15-17). As the risen Messiah, all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him (Matt. 28:18).

But godly leaders must also remember that the same Jesus who has had everything placed under His feet (Eph. 1:22) was the One who washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17). This same Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This is the model of leadership we are to follow. We are to be servant-leaders who follow Christ Jesus in total dependency while simultaneously leading others in total humility.

How do you treat the authorities above you? What about those you are in authority over?

Day 5: Read 1 Kings 3:16-28

Solomon’s credibility as a ruler was established when he gave a wise ruling in the case of the two prostitutes. But let’s not miss the fact that this was a difficult case! There were no witnesses. It was virtually impossible for anyone to know all the facts. And there was the added pressure of dismissing the needs of these two prostitutes because, after all, it’s not like they were important members of the community, right?

Don’t forget that all these issues Solomon faced when trying to judge between the two women are issues that modern-day judges, police officers, and politicians have to face every single day. They are called upon to exercise wisdom and judgment, often in the absence of facts, for the sake of the truth and without showing favoritism. This is just one of many reasons we are commanded in the New Testament to pray for “kings and all those who are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Leading with wisdom is hard, and without our prayer support, it may be impossible.

How can you pray for your local and national leaders today?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The Request for Wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-9)
- The Gift of Wisdom (1 Kings 3:10-15)
- The Exercise of Wisdom (1 Kings 3:23-28)

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

Do you think of yourself as a wise person? Why or why not? How should this affect the way you pray and interact with others?

According to Scripture, would you say wisdom has more to do with intelligence or morality? What does this suggest about our need for it?

Notes

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UNIT 10

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

UNIT 11

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

SESSION 5

SESSION 6

UNIT 12

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4
3. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Large Catechism*, trans. John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis, MN: The Luther Press, 1908), 44.
In this volume of The Gospel Project, we cover the roughly one hundred and twenty years of Israel’s heyday: the united monarchy. After decades of the devastating cycle of sin and deliverance and being ruled by a series of judges, the Israelites called on Samuel to appoint a king for them—one like those of the nations around them. God warned His people that what they were requesting would lead to heartache and trouble, but they insisted. So God, in His kindness, gave them what they wanted in order to teach them to trust Him.

What followed was a series of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon, each ruling for about forty years. In some ways, these kings provide us with examples to follow: the fierce determination of David not to stand for anyone impugning God’s character; the mercy and kindness David showed to a foe and his family; the wisdom of Solomon. But we also discover that each of these three men fell woefully short of being the king God’s people wanted and needed, each one proving God’s warnings true. Bookending God’s people crying out as one for a king at the start of this volume, by the time we finish, we encounter God’s people being divided into two kingdoms.

Our takeaway is clear: The hope of humanity does not rest in any human king or leader but is fixed solely and securely in the King of kings, Jesus Christ. But at the same time, we see that God delights in using His people despite their failings. God would fulfill His covenant with David, even though he committed adultery and murder. This reaffirmed the promises God had made to Abraham generations before. And though Solomon would succumb to polygamy and idolatry, God used him to build the temple, a place for God’s people to worship and be in relationship with God.

So consider as you study: What might God do through us?