

1 Kings 3
October 27, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: I bet that at some point in our life, we've had to answer the question of what you'd wish for if a genie in a lamp appeared and offered us anything you wanted. Do we know what we'd ask for from our genie? What if God gave us the chance to ask for "anything" we wanted? That is a loaded question! In fact, we might even say, "Let me pray about what to ask for!"

But...for the "just in case" you already know what you'd ask God for, what would it be? [Let people engage]

Transition: Solomon is new in his role as king and is keenly aware that he is young – with no experience in leadership. He knows he's ruling over too many people to count. Today we are reading a pretty well-known passage in which the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and asks him, "What should I give you?" I think we all know what the answer was, but let's read it again and process it.

BOOK:

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

3 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. **2** The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. **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.

4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. **5** At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

6 Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

7 "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. **8** Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. **9** 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?"

10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. **11** 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, **12** 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. **13** Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and

honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.”
¹⁵ Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.

He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. (peace offerings) Then he gave a feast for all his court.

A Wise Ruling

¹⁶ Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷ One of them said, “My lord, this woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby while she was there with me. ¹⁸ The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.

¹⁹ “During the night this woman’s son died because she lay on him. ²⁰ So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. ²¹ The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t the son I had borne.”

²² The other woman said, “No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.”

But the first one insisted, “No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.” And so they argued before the king.

²³ The king said, “This one says, ‘My son is alive and your son is dead,’ while that one says, ‘No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.’ ”

²⁴ Then the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought a sword for the king. ²⁵ He then gave an order: “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.”

²⁶ 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!”

²⁷ Then the king gave his ruling: “Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.”

²⁸ 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

When we seek God’s will first, he always adds other blessings to us. Solomon’s primary desire for wisdom enabled God to bless him in many other ways, even in spite of his errors. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matt. 6:33).

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Kings 3). Victor Books.

III. Solomon Receives God's Wisdom (3)

Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess was purely a political move; later he was to wed other heathen women (11:1ff) and be turned away from the true worship of Jehovah. But at the beginning of his career, he had a sincere love for the Lord and wanted to put Him first in his life. When God gave Solomon the privilege of asking for anything he wanted, he asked for wisdom and an understanding heart; and God answered his prayer. Furthermore, God gave him all the other blessings too (Matt. 6:33). Of course, if Solomon wanted to enjoy these blessings, he would have to walk in obedience to the Word (vv. 13–14).

The account of the two mothers is but one of many illustrations of the wisdom of Solomon. The fact that these two women had access to the king's throne shows how much young Solomon loved his people and wanted to serve them. How wonderful it is that every Christian has access to the throne of one who is "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42), and who promises to give wisdom and to meet every need. Certainly all of us need to depend on the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of this world (1 Cor. 1:18–31; James 3:13–18).

It is a precious truth to the Christian that God equips us for our calling. God made Solomon king, and God supplied all that he needed to serve acceptably. "Ask and it shall be given you."

Constable, C.L. (1985). 1 Kings. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 494-495) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

2. SOLOMON'S PERSONAL WISDOM (CHAP. 3)

The wisdom of Solomon, already evident in the record of his dealings with his political enemies, is reemphasized in chapter 3.

a. *Solomon's attitudes (3:1-3)*

The king's attitudes toward his office and his God are set forth and account for God's blessing.

3:1. This note by the author may be out of chronological sequence with the other events of Solomon's life. It is added here as an important historical fact and a portent of things to come. **Solomon made a peace treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt** (probably Siamon of the 21st dynasty) and sealed it by marrying **his daughter**. The motivation for this marriage was obviously political. Solomon was not as careful about marrying non-Israelites as he should have been. But this union did result in peace with Israel's neighbor to the southwest who was weak during Solomon's reign. Solomon housed this bride in **Jerusalem**. After he **finished** several building projects including **his palace ... the temple**, and other buildings (cf. 7:2-7), he prepared a special house (a palace) for her (cf. 7:8).

3:2-3. During the period of the Judges the Israelites adopted the Canaanite custom of offering sacrifices **at ... high places**. These were on hilltops and other elevations. The pagan Canaanites felt that the closer they got to heaven the more likely was the possibility that their prayers and offerings would reach their gods. Offering sacrifices at places other than the tabernacle was prohibited in the Law (Lev. 17:3-4). Nevertheless this practice was commonly observed in Israel at this time, even by Solomon. The **temple** refers to Solomon's temple, not the tabernacle. In general, **Solomon** was careful to follow in David's godly footsteps thus demonstrating his love for Yahweh.

b. *Solomon's prayer for wisdom (3:4-15)*

3:4-5. The **most important** (popular or largest) **high place** was at **Gibeon** about five miles north of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin. There **Solomon** made a great sacrifice to the Lord. Evidently that very night **the LORD** revealed Himself to **the king.... in a dream**. Such revelations were not uncommon in ancient Israel (cf. Gen. 28:10-15; 37:5-7; etc.). **God** invited Solomon to **ask for whatever** he wanted. There seems to be a cause-and-effect relationship between Solomon's loving generosity in making his offering to the Lord and God's loving generosity in making him this offer.

3:6-9. **Solomon** recognized that God's **kindness** to **David** was due to his father's faithfulness to God which manifested itself in **righteous** actions and **upright** attitudes of **heart**. The king also acknowledged his own immaturity and need for God's wisdom. Solomon was about 20 years old when he took the throne.

In calling himself a **child**, he was admitting his inexperience (cf. 1 Chron. 22:5; 29:1). Solomon was concerned that he would be able to function effectively as the vice-regent of Yahweh. His responsibility as the leader and judge of God's **people** weighed heavily on him. So

he requested a **discerning heart** (lit., “a hearing heart”) tuned to the voice of **God** so he could lead Israel as God would want the nation to be led. He acknowledged his dependence on God by referring to himself as God’s **servant** (1 Kings 3:7–8).

3:10–14. **Solomon** placed the good of God’s people above his personal peace or prosperity and above any desire to become a powerful and popular king. His values were in the right place from God’s perspective. Therefore, **God** promised to give him what he requested. He would possess a **wise ... heart** (v. 12) and be able to discern and render fair judgments (v. 11). Since Solomon sought what was most important God also promised to give him what was of secondary importance, **riches and honor**, to further enable him to govern God’s people effectively. Solomon was to be the richest and most honored king of his day. **If** Solomon remained faithful to pursue the will of God, obeying the Law of Moses, God promised he would also live a **long life**.

3:15. As is often the case, a blessing from God drew the person blessed into a closer relationship with Himself. Inspired by this revelation **Solomon** turned from the high place and proceeded to the divinely appointed place of worship, the tabernacle. He did not enter the most holy place; only the high priest could enter there once a year (Lev. 16). But the king **stood before the ark of the LORD’s covenant**, outside the tabernacle facing toward the ark. **Burnt offerings** expressed the complete dedication of oneself to God and **fellowship offerings** symbolized the fellowship people can enjoy with God and with others through God’s grace. Solomon’s **feast** expressed his joy and gratitude to the members of **his court**.

c. Solomon’s demonstration of wisdom (3:16–28)

This incident was undoubtedly included at this point to show that God had indeed given Solomon the wisdom He promised (cf. v. 12). Significantly the essence of wisdom is revealed in Solomon’s handling of this difficult case. The king had insight into basic human nature (in this case, maternal instincts) that enabled him to understand why people behave as they do and how they will respond in various situations. The opposite of this ability is seen in simply judging people’s superficial words and actions.

3:16–23. **Two prostitutes living in the same house** each had a **baby** three days apart. One of the boy babies **died** during **the night** and his mother exchanged the dead child for the living child. In the **morning** when the other woman discovered that the **dead** son was not hers, the guilty mother refused to admit her wrongdoing. Unable to settle their dispute they appeared before **the king**, each one claiming **the living** infant was hers.

3:24–27. Solomon ordered that the baby be **cut ... in two**. As he had anticipated, the child’s mother, not wanting it killed, volunteered to let the other woman have the **baby**, rather than have it killed. When **the other** woman argued that the baby should be **cut ... in two**, it was evident that she, having no compassion for the child, was not the **living** son’s **mother**.

3:28. Solomon’s **wisdom** in this case became known throughout his kingdom so that he was admired as a wise administrator of **justice**.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 136). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God’s Gift of Wisdom (3:1–28). Solomon married Pharaoh’s daughter, which evidences Solomon’s significance in the international community (7:8; 9:24). Solomon loved the Lord and obeyed Him as his father had, but he also practiced sacrifice at local shrines. This custom would become a snare when he turned to idolatrous worship at such high places (see Deut. 12:11–14).

Solomon requested in a dream the wisdom needed to serve the people of God. God granted him wisdom and more (1 Kgs. 3:4–15). An example of his wisdom was his ability to settle a dispute between two prostitutes. The people realized that his wisdom came from God.

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 1 Kings. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 195-196). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 3:1–4:34)

The passage—Solomon is well known for his wisdom. Unfortunately, that wisdom was not used altogether. Solomon was foolish in marrying foreign wives, giving way to lust, and in his materialism.

God appeared to Solomon at Gibeon and offered to bless Solomon according to his request. Solomon praised God for his blessings to David. His one request of God was for wisdom. He wanted an understanding mind to be able to govern well. God granted his request and also promised him riches and honor as well as long life.

Solomon's wisdom is well illustrated in his dealing with the two harlots. Each claimed to be the mother of a baby and said the child of the other had died. Solomon told them to cut the baby in half so each mother could have a share. The true mother asked that the baby be allowed to live and be given to the other woman. Solomon granted the baby to its real mother. All of Israel recognized his profound wisdom. His wisdom is also shown in the very efficient organization of his government as described in chapter 4.

Israel prospered under Solomon. Its borders were greatly enlarged. There was peace. The people and Israel's neighbors also were happy with his reign and their welfare.

Special points—Solomon's marriage to so many foreign wives was a matter of political expediency. The problem, in addition to the immorality of the situation, lay in the religious practices of his foreign wives. Solomon erected heathen shrines for them.

Truth for today—The Bible warns against the marriage of Christians to non-Christians. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14) or "Do not be mis-mated with unbelievers."

When we seek God's will first, he always adds other blessings to us. Solomon's primary desire for wisdom enabled God to bless him in many other ways, even in spite of his errors. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matt. 6:33).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Kings 3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.