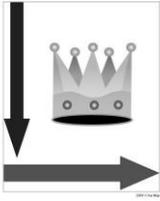


Week Twenty: A King Needs God's Wisdom - 1 Kings 3



Objective

Adam and Eve believed that they could live independently of God; most of their descendants choose the same independent path. Man is not smart enough to navigate this sinful world and desperately needs God's wisdom; tragically, too few seek the LORD and His wisdom.

David's son Solomon starts off differently from those around him. God appears to Solomon early in his reign and asks what He may give to him. Solomon recognizes the responsibility he has been given and his own limitations, so he requests wisdom, "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9). This request pleases the LORD and He grants Solomon His wisdom.

Immediately Solomon faces an impossible situation regarding two prostitutes, one of whose babies had died. He settles the matter in a judicious manner that elevates him in the eyes of all Israel. Proverbs 3:5-6 characterizes the early reign of King Solomon, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

This lesson demonstrates how much leaders need wisdom and how everyone benefits when leaders lead wisely.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will understand how Solomon's request for God's wisdom benefited others and endorsed his reign over Israel.

Key Truths

Man is not smart enough to navigate this sinful world without the wisdom of God on his life.

Leaders who manifest the wisdom of God in their lives create a climate of trust in the community of their followers.

Situations in life occur which overwhelm us and are beyond our wisdom. God alone knows all and can reveal His perspective to those who seek it.

Lesson Outline

1. Wisdom's Origin - 1 Kings 3:1-15

Solomon inherits his father's throne, and with that throne comes the responsibility of leading God's people. He also inherits an agenda from his father--that of building a temple for God in Jerusalem—but he does not inherit wisdom, for it cannot be inherited. Each individual must receive wisdom from God for his own day and for his own tasks.

Solomon loves the LORD, walks in His statutes, and worships Him extravagantly during his early years. One night, God interrupts his dreams and generously extends an offer, "Ask What shall I give you?" (3:5).

Solomon's answer reveals his recognition of his own limitations because of the responsibility that lies before him: "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?" (3:9).

Wisdom surpasses knowledge and human experience. Solomon has both. His father has passed along the stories about King Saul and his own life, and Solomon has grown up in the home of a king, and these very stories remind Solomon that mere knowledge and human experience are not enough to lead God's people. He needs wisdom--God's wisdom.

Solomon describes wisdom as a heart attitude of dependence toward God that allows him to discern good and evil in his own life as well as others' lives: "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (3:9). Wisdom is seeing life from God's perspective--the recognition that life does not make sense apart from God--and living life with the discernment that flows from that perspective.

Solomon's wisest request may have been this one, for his answer pleases God; thus God gives him a wise and understanding heart that distinguishes Solomon from all other kings who have ever lived. Further, because Solomon asks for wisdom, rather than riches, honor, long life, or the lives of his enemies, God also gives Solomon all that he does not request, "Both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any one like you among the kings all your days" (3:13). God summarizes his answer with a statement about Bible literacy, "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" (3:14).

Solomon awakes from his dream, returns to Jerusalem, and worships before the ark of the covenant of the LORD with burnt offerings and peace offerings. He then throws a party for all of his servants. What a great day God is with their king

2. Wisdom's Operation - 1 Kings 3:16-27

Scripture doesn't record how much time passes before God's wisdom is manifested in an unusual way and in most unusual circumstances. The case presented to Solomon parallels some of the strange cases seen on TV in Judge Judy's courtroom. Two

harlots (one lying and one telling the truth), two babies (one alive and one dead), and no fair solution to be had. Who's the mother of the living baby?

Solomon promptly calls for the baby, a sword, and the division of the live baby--one half for each woman. Those in the court gasp. An extreme measure to be sure, especially for the real mother, who would rather see her son raised by a liar than not raised at all. Solomon's judgment reveals the heart of the real mother, "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him," and the heart of the lying mother, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him" (3:26).

Wisdom is living truth, God's perspective revealed in real life circumstances. It is God in action, acting in life's most difficult of situations. It is available to kings who ask and benefits those who are most vulnerable.

3. Wisdom's Outcome - 1 Kings 3:27-28; 10:1-13

The real mother finds justice and is rewarded her son. "So the king answered and said,

"Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother" (3:27).

The case and its surprising result captivate all of Israel and rallies their full support for Solomon as king, "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice" (3:28).

The manifestation of God's wisdom in Solomon creates an interest among leaders of other countries. The Queen of Sheba travels to Jerusalem from afar to test Solomon's wisdom and blesses the Lord, "Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel Because the LORD has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness" (1 Kings 10:9). She fulfills the blessing of God upon Abraham and his descendants, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3b).

Man needs the wisdom that comes from God. James promises God's wisdom for those who come to Him, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). We need His wisdom and the world needs His wisdom filtered through our lives. Sadly, many pursue long life, riches, and revenge, and neglect the wisdom offered by God.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

- Situations constantly occur in life which require more than human knowledge to navigate or resolve.
- God's wisdom manifests in unusual situations to highlight man's limitations and God's eternal perspective.
- People confidently follow those whose lives manifest the wisdom of God but live in fear when led by foolish leaders (Prov. 29:2).
- Leaders who lead without God's wisdom are unable to offer unbiased justice.

Summary

God speaks by inviting His servant to ask what he would like; that perennial offer still holds true for today. Those who recognize their limitations and need avail themselves of God's offer (James 1:5-6).

God acts by providing "real life" opportunities for His wisdom to shine.

God reveals Himself to Solomon through a dream, and He reveals Himself to the nation through the wise king. He reveals that justice comes from God. Only the Judge of all the earth does what is right.

Discussion Questions

If God appeared to you and told you to ask Him for anything, for what would you ask?

What situations exist in your life or church that necessitate God's wisdom? How do you differentiate between worldly wisdom and God's wisdom?