

1 Kings 3-4 // The Wisest Man Who Ever Lived

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Date: 15 March 2026

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[0:00] The first reading today is from 1 Kings, sorry, chapter 3, verses 1 to 15, and that's page 337 of your Bibles. 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. The people, however, were still sacrificing at high places because the temple had not yet been built for the name of the Lord.

Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father, David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

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.

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. Solomon answered, You have shown me great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart.

[1:24] You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, 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. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people too numerous to count or number.

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?

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, Since you have asked for this, and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have you asked for the death of your enemies, but for discernment and administering justice, I will do what you have asked.

I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never be anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for, both wealth and honor, so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.

[2:37] And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands, as David your father did, I will give you a long life. 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. Then he gave a feast for all his court.

Thank you very much for reading that. The second reading is in two parts, so we'll start from where we left off, which is 1 Kings 3, verses 16 to 28.

And then we'll jump ahead to chapter 4, verses 25 to 34. So we're starting on page 338 of your Bibles.

And we'll start with chapter 3, verses 16 to 28. Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.

[3:48] One of them said, Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby while she was there with me. 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. During the night, this woman's son died because she lay on him. 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. 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

my son I had born.

The other woman said, No, the living one is my son and 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. 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.

[5:00] Then the king said, Bring me a sword. So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order, Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.

The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love 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. Then the king gave his ruling. Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him. She is his mother. 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.

Now we'll jump across to chapter 4, verses 25 to 34. During Solomon's lifetime, Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree. Solomon had 4,000 stalls for chariot horses and 12,000 horses. The district governors, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table.

[6:25] They saw to it that nothing was lacking. They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses.

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the east and greater than the wisdom of Egypt.

He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan, the Ezraite, wiser than Himon, Calcol, and Dada, the sons of Mahal.

And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke 3,000 proverbs and his songs numbered 1,005. He spoke about plant life from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the walls.

He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations, people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom sent by all the kings of the world who had heard of his wisdom.

[7:35] This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Matt, thank you very much for reading that.

Be a great help to me if you can keep your Bibles open at 1 Kings 3 and 4. And you can find an outline on the back of the notice sheet if that would help you. But let's pray.

Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you for your word, for your salvation plan, for the gift of your Holy Spirit here with us now.

Holy Spirit, we worship you as the giver of life and truth. And we ask that you'll speak to us now and open our hearts to your word. That wherever we stand today, whether just visiting and looking in or we've been a Christian a long time, would you grant that each one of us would take a step forward in trusting you, in loving you and in following you.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Solomon has a dream here that puts him face to face with the true and living God.

[8:45] So it's the real version of the moment that we might think of standing at a wishing well throwing in a coin or the moment someone blows out the candles on their birthday cake or the moment in a fairy tale where the genie comes out of the lamp and says, your wish is my command.

The question is, if you could have anything you want, what would you ask for? Solomon is king of God's people and we've started this series in 1 Kings.

So we're with the Old Testament people of God after Moses, after Joshua, after great King David. And this is David's son Solomon who's been anointed and established as king.

And in verse 5, God says, make a wish. Verse 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.

So if God asked you that question today and you knew it would be answered, what would you ask for? Solomon starts by remembering the kindness of God in verse 6.

[9:52] He says, you've shown great kindness to your servant, my father David. Then he says, you've continued this great kindness to him. Whatever we think about God today, maybe you've come and you need to be reminded that he is a God of great kindness.

Solomon starts there and then he's overwhelmed by the task God has given him to rule over the people. And so in verse 9, he asks God for a discerning heart.

Verse 9, so give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. Now when we use the word heart, we sometimes just mean our emotions, our feelings.

But the Bible word heart is about our thinking as well. It's about what we love, but it's also about what we choose and about our thinking. It's who we are on the inside.

And this request to have a wise heart, to be wise, greatly pleases God. So he replies to Solomon in verse 12 and it's like he throws in a whole bag of extra gifts as well, things he might have asked for if he was being a bit more selfish.

[11:03] If you look at verse 12, 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, I will give you what you've not asked for, both wealth and honour, so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.

And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life. Well, we'll see how Solomon gets on with that in the coming weeks.

But because Solomon didn't ask self-centredly for health and wealth and recognition, God says he'll freely give Solomon those things anyway. But he's also going to give him the thing that he really asked for, wisdom.

And from this, we're encouraged this morning to appreciate the real value of wisdom. Is that what we would have asked for from God? In Proverbs, which is a book in the Bible that's largely a collection of Solomon's wisdom sayings, he says this himself in chapter 3.

He says, Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.

[12:18] She, that's wisdom, is more precious than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand. In her left hand are riches and honour.

Her ways are pleasant ways. And all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. Those who hold her fast will be blessed.

See what Solomon's saying there in Proverbs chapter 3. He's saying, yearn for wisdom, to get wisdom. Because there are loads of things you could have in life and if you didn't have wisdom, they will ruin you.

And if you've got wisdom from God, there's loads of things you don't need in life and you'll still flourish because of wisdom. Solomon's wisdom is what these two chapters are about and we're going to see first the special nature of Solomon's wisdom and then we're going to see what it leads to, this magnificent life living under the wisdom of his rule.

And then thirdly, we look at the stunning brilliance of Solomon's wisdom. So first of all, the special nature of Solomon's wisdom. First, we're seeing that it's God-given.

[13:28] It's a gift from God in verse 9. Solomon asks God for wisdom. So today, if you think of who is the wise person today, looking out at our world, who does the world hold up as wise?

Who are the gurus that we really listen to? They might look wise in a worldly way, but if they live without reference to God, they're actually foolish.

In Bible categories. To live as though God is not there in his world is not the way to flourish.

Wisdom starts with a fear of God and dependence on him.

It's given by God. And Solomon shows us next that Bible wisdom is practical. It's useful. Again in verse 9, he says to the Lord, give your servant a discerning heart to govern, to govern your people for who is able to govern this great people of yours.

So if you think of the wisest person you know, in today's world, I was thinking of Carol Vorderman, right, of Countdown.

[14:32] Okay, but then I checked and she's not done Countdown for many years. So apparently, it's Rachel Riley who's been doing Countdown for a very long time. I just didn't know.

So I love hate relationship with Countdown because I did a gap year, right, where I went traveling all around the world and I met up with like extended family when I got back and I said, can I tell you about my trip?

And one of them said, well, you can later, but Countdown's about to start. So that was where I ranked in the sort of family priorities. Anyway, Rachel Riley, clearly a genius, can do the numbers, solve the number crunching on Countdown.

Okay, or maybe you think of University Challenge, the people selected to represent their university because their head's so full of facts. The world might say that's wisdom, but actually, biblical wisdom has to be useful.

It's about the skill to flourish in God's world. So you might even be able to think of someone who's kind of brilliant at getting straight A's, but day by day, they just can't do anything.

[15:39] They can't function. Their head's in the clouds. So that's not wise. Well, in these chapters, wisdom is tied closely with discernment. We keep getting those words together, this idea that if you're a wise person, when you're faced with dilemmas in life, options, choices that are difficult, the discernment to know what's the right thing to choose here is a gift from God.

That's the kind of skill Solomon is asking for, ability to govern well. And we see that in chapter four as he appoints chief officials to, he oversees an administration so that the land is governed well. And we see from Solomon next that Bible wisdom is charitable. It's deployed for the good of others. Solomon asks in verse nine for a discerning heart to govern God's people so that they'll flourish. Wisdom is about looking to the interests of others so that they can benefit. And fourthly, we see that wisdom is just. It's about doing what's right. So when God says to Solomon in verse 11, I'll grant you wisdom, he says it's discernment in administering justice.

He needs to be able to tell right from wrong. And we see all those qualities of Bible wisdom on display in that extraordinary next scene from verse 16 as these two prostitutes come to the king and they stand before him.

[17:03] That's another thing to notice about wisdom is that wisdom is merciful. So in what kind of a land would you have two prostitutes able to get an audience with the king about their disputes?

In other nations at that time, I guess prostitutes might have been regarded as low in society and hard to reach the kind of the power corridors.

But Solomon mercifully grants these women an audience to resolve this dispute. There's mercy. And the two women, we heard it in our reading, they both give birth, living in the same house three days apart.

Tragically, one of the babies has died, but the first woman is claiming that the second woman, it was her son that died and she swapped the babies. And the living son is hers.

There are no other witnesses to help in a house where, I take it, men would have come and gone, but evidently they hadn't. And so there's no one to help Solomon, but he gets what to do.

[18:06] And here we are looking at it on Mother's Day and Solomon makes a decree that discerns which of these women has a mother's love for this baby, cut the boy in two, give them half each.

And one of the women cries out, please my Lord, give her the living baby. And the king says, that's the mother, give the boy to her. And we see there, don't we, his wisdom is practical, he knows what to do, it's charitable, they go away having benefited, it's just, it's the right outcome.

And it's awesome. So in verse 28, we read that all of Israel held the king in awe after he'd done that. How had he known? It's such a wise thing to do.

And did you notice, if you just look down again at verses 16 to 28, all through the account, Solomon isn't named anymore. It just says again and again, the king, the king, the king.

Because this is wisdom fit for a king. This is the kind of leader that you need. All for leaders like this. Think about how people in the world today talk about our government leaders or the leaders of other governments.

[19:10] How many of them ever say things like that? Oh, you know, that leader is just so wise to govern charitably, to act justly, to decide practically.

We're in awe of them. We'd love leaders like that, wouldn't we? Well, God gave his people a leader like that in 970 BC. And crucially, the benefits for the people are astonishing.

That's our next point. The magnificent life under Solomon's wisdom. So we're in chapter 4 now, verse 20, where it's summed up so wonderfully what it was like to live under that wisdom.

Look at verse 20 of chapter 4. The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They ate, they drank, and they were happy. Now what's going on there is as soon as we see as numerous as the sand on the seashore, it's like a hyperlink in your Bible that points us back to God's promises to Abraham.

And you can read the Bible as the unfolding story of how God would keep those promises. the promises that God will build his kingdom where God's people will live in God's place under his rule.

[20:19] And he said to Abraham, your descendants will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky. So God is faithful to his promises. He's blessing the people.

They're God's people. Verse 21, they're living in God's place and the boundaries have spilt over of the promised land. Verse 21, Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the river Euphrates to the land of the Philistines as far as the border of Egypt.

These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life. So they're living safely, they're living in the land, they're prosperous, they're secure, and the blessing, well, it's extraordinary, isn't it?

What kind of prosperity allows the king's court to get this every day? Verse 22, his daily provisions, the footnotes tell us what they mean, 10 tons of meal, 5 tons of flour, 30 cows, 100 sheep and goats, deer, gazelles, robux, choice, fowl.

Every day, every day. Solomon is a billionaire many times over. And crucially, this isn't like the French Revolution where the royalty have kind of got opulence and everyone else is in poverty.

[21:34] This is an overflow of the blessing that God is pouring out on the people during that season. So, verse 25, during Solomon's lifetime, Judah and Israel from Dan to Beersheba, that's one end to the other, they lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and fig tree.

Or as we saw back up at verse 20 again, they ate, they drank, they drank and they were happy.

This is the good life, isn't it? Eat, drink and be happy. Enjoy the good gifts God has given you.

Wouldn't you like to live there? What a time to be alive. Solomon's reign. We sometimes get surveys, don't we, of the happiest places to live in the world.

I was looking them up this week. Do you know what the happiest countries are to live in this year? You can probably guess them. They kind of don't change much. Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Costa Rica.

Costa Rica made it in. Norway, Norway, the happiest cities, Copenhagen, Zurich, Singapore, Antwerp, and Seoul. But, I was looking at this and Time Out magazine worked out last year with a new methodology, the happiest cities to live in in the world, Time Out magazine.

[22:53] And, in their survey, to do that, in their research, two UK cities made it into Time Out's top 20 happiest cities to live in in the world. Brighton and Glasgow.

What do you think of that? Before you start moving, right? Turns out, we've never had it so good. Well, it's true, you can look it up. Even if we live in, we just scraped in, to be honest, 20th happiest city in the world.

It's got nothing on Solomon's Israel. That's what we're seeing. This was the golden age. This was the platinum age. People caught a glimpse in history of what it would be like to live enjoying the blessing of God under the wise king of king that God has given you.

It's the let the good times roll age. So much so that this picture of everyone lived under their own vine and fig tree becomes like an emblem, like a motif, like the dream for the people of God for centuries to come after that.

So by the time this account was being written, it's all lost. The people have endured the horror of exile. They're outside the land looking back and God sent prophets that we have later in the Old

Testament to promise that he was going to put things right.

[24:14] and the prophet Micah, the words are on the screen there, God said through the prophet Micah in chapter 4, speaking about the last days that God will bring about, he said, verse 3, the Lord will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide.

Then we get peace, promise, verse 3, they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Well, who wouldn't want to live in a world like that? And then there's the emblem from 1 Kings 4, it comes in verse 4, Micah 4, everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree and no one will make them afraid for the Lord Almighty has spoken.

So you see what God's doing there through the prophet Micah, he is tethering our yearnings for a better future for our world to the promises of a wise king to come like Solomon.

And then in John chapter 1, I think this is what's going on when Philip meets Jesus and he goes and gets his friend Nathaniel and he brings him to Jesus and Jesus says to Nathaniel, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.

[25:37] And he might have just been under a fig tree, but Nathaniel's reaction to what Jesus says to him is, Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel.

So it seems more likely that when Jesus said that to Nathaniel, he was telling him, I know exactly what's in your heart, Nathaniel. You're someone who dreams of the day when God's messianic age comes and each person can sit under their own fig tree in safety and prosperity.

And Jesus says to Nathaniel, you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree, you'll see greater things than that. So back with Solomon, we've thought about the nature of his wisdom, we've seen the blessing of living under his wisdom and then chapter 4 of 1 Kings ends by showing us the stunning brilliance of Solomon's wisdom.

So look at the breadth of it in verse 29. God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

Then the supremacy of his wisdom, verse 30, it was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the east and then on the other side greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else including these people, we don't know who they are but I guess they were known across the world for being very wise people, we just don't talk about them anymore because Solomon's wisdom so far surpassed them.

[27:05] Wiser than anyone else who'd ever lived. Verse 32, he spoke 3,000 proverbs and his songs numbered 1,005. That's wisdom we've got in our Bibles today in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

Then look at the scope of his wisdom, not just the arts but the sciences. Verse 33, he spoke about plant life from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.

That's a reference back to the Garden of Eden. This is what humanity was meant to be and the word spreads. Verse 34, from all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom sent by all the kings of the world because they'd heard of his wisdom.

So the Bible wants us to get clear in our minds. If you get a wise king with Bible wisdom, bless people. Wise king, bless people.

A blessing that overflows to the world. If your king is the wisest man who's ever lived, it's not just like having a wise neighbour. You can drop round and see when you've got a leaking shower or something and they can come and help.

[28:15] Having a wise king means that the good times roll. God blesses his people and after Solomon, for generation after generation, God's people who were faithfully trusting the promises of the word of God of the Bible could have thought to themselves if only God would send another king like that.

A king who was wise like Solomon. He would know what to do. And the New Testament announces for us now we have such a king. Solomon's wisdom was God-given and we come to our king, Jesus, and the apostle John says he is the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

He is the wisdom of God personified come in the flesh. Christ, the wisdom of God. Solomon's wisdom was charitable, poured out for the good of others and Jesus comes on a rescue mission that through his death he will defeat death and give life to his people.

And he fulfilled a plan so wise, so wisely devised that it saves everyone who believes from any nation. And as the apostle Paul writes about that in Romans 9-11 about God's wise salvation plan to save the nations and save Israel, he breaks off in praise in Romans 11 and says, oh the depths of the wisdom of the knowledge of God.

How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. Here is the wisdom of God charitably poured out for others. Solomon showed us that real wisdom is practical, it's useful so that people flourish in God's world.

[29:59] And in Luke 11 Jesus says, blessed are those who hear my words and put them into practice. And true wisdom is just. And Jesus demonstrated the justice of God at the cross as he bore the penalty for the sin of his people so that he could be just and justify ungodly people.

And he promises that in the future he will judge the world with justice because he is the one who truly knows all things. No one will be unaccounted for.

Everything can be put right. And it means for us today if we'll put our trust in Jesus and we'll walk with Jesus he's like the wise Jesus says whoever hears my words and puts them into practice he's like the wise man who builds his house on the rock.

So we can find wisdom from his words and as we walk with him we can grow in wisdom. He has wisdom for us. But more than that Jesus has wisdom as he rules over us.

So we can trust today that whatever's going on in our lives the man who really is the wisest man who's ever lived is in control and if you trust him he is for you.

[31:14] Nothing can take him by surprise. He was wise enough to endure the most evil moment in history. Humans putting God to death and use that for the greatest good in human history the saving of the people that his father has given him to be his holy bride.

And if you're here this morning and things going on in your life make absolutely no sense to you you know you can't get a job or you're afraid you're going to lose your job. You can't sleep with worry about something.

You're lonely. What we need to hear today is Jesus is wise enough to work this out for your good. He's wise enough to take all your greatest setbacks all your missed opportunities and roll them up and work them together for good purposes to make you grow in him and depend on him and find joy in him.

And one area I think it's especially good to remember this is when we look back on our lives and bad choices we feel that we might have made. Not just in moral failures where we need to go to Jesus and be reassured that we're free from guilt.

I find that in pastoral conversations with people often people feel regret in life about kind of sliding doors moments in their life where we said no to something and now we think I got that wrong if only I'd gone through that door if only I'd said yes to that if we were faced with a choice and we look back and we think we made the wrong choice about what subject to study or where to work or where to live or whether to go out with somebody and what that might have led to and we feel this deep sense of regret and we wonder what might have been and we think oh I'm sort of trapped by the bad choices I've made.

[33:08] Well we might have got things wrong we might have been foolish but we have a wise king and your life and my life are in the hands of the wisest man who's ever lived and if we trust him then no foolishness on our part can stop his magnificent plan for your life.

He is wise enough to work through that. He's got a plan that stretches forward into the future where he will finish his work in you and he'll bring you to live forever with him and that liberates us from anguish about things we've got wrong.

When we've got decisions to make when we've got dilemmas in life our decisions do matter we can ask God for wisdom we can seek wise counsel do our best to make the right choice but then we can entrust it to him.

He won't let us down he can give us rest by trusting his wisdom. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we praise you that you've given us the king that we need a wise king and that we his people can enjoy the blessing of relationship with you and look forward to days that Solomon's golden age only gives a glimpse of days of security and prosperity and joy and so as we look back at Solomon's golden age thank you that we live now with such a wise king the Lord Jesus help us to walk into this week fully trusting his wisdom for our good and your glory.
Amen.