

A Matter of Heart

Solomon: The Renaissance King – Part II

I Kings 3:16-4:34

Introduction

James Dobson once told a story about a friend, who, some years ago, was flying his single-engine airplane toward a small country airport. When he arrived, the sun had already dropped behind a mountain at the close of the day. By the time he maneuvered into a position to land, he could not see the hazy field below. He had no lights on his plane and there was no one on duty at the small airport. He circled the runway for another attempt to land, but the darkness had then become even more impenetrable. For two hours, he flew his plane around and around in the blackness of the night, knowing that he faced certain death when his fuel ran out.

Then, as panic began to grip him, a wonderful thing occurred. Someone on the ground, who lived near the airport, had heard the continuing drone of his engine and realized his predicament. That kind, merciful man got in his car, raced to the runway, and drove his car back and forth on the runway to show the pilot the location of the airstrip. He then, parked his car at the far end of the runway and let his lights cast their illuminating beam down the runway. The pilot landed safely.

The early years of Solomon's reign, as well as his writings, provide a set of brilliant headlights that illumine the runway of our own lives. We are prone to speed up the videotape to the place in his life where he himself, crashed in despair. Today, however, I want to spend some time reflecting on his incredible beginning. It was a beginning that was marked by

integrity of heart, loyalty to scriptures, and great wisdom.

Today, let us drink in as much as we can of Solomon's wisdom from those early years. It is, even now, serving as a brilliant light to guide us through the darkness of our world.

In our last discussion, we studied Solomon's wish was for wisdom and the fact that God granted the wish. Now, the remainder of I Kings, chapter 3, is nothing more than an illustration of wisdom and discernment.

Wisdom . . . From the Bench!

I invite your attention back to I Kings, chapter 3, for a dramatic day in court. We will call this, "Wisdom . . . from the bench!"

Let us slip into the back of Solomon's courtroom. He is, as the supreme court justice of Israel, presiding over an unusual and, undoubtedly, a "no win" case. Look at verses 16 through 22.

Then two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him.

The one woman said, "Oh, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house.

It happened on the third day after I gave birth, that this woman also gave birth to a child, and we were together. There was no stranger with us in the house, only the two of us in the house."

(In other words, there were no witnesses.)

“This woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on it.

So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead son in my bosom.

When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, behold, he was dead; but when I looked at him carefully in the morning, behold, he was not my son, whom I had borne.”

Then the other woman said, “No! For the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son.” But the first woman said, “No! For the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son.” Thus they spoke before the king.

The background

The background to this case is that two prostitutes gave birth to children three days apart. That must have been one noisy apartment!

The dispute then, began between the two of them, and it must have escalated to the neighbors, then to their community of friends, and on to the local magistrates, and, ultimately, it came before the supreme court and thus, Solomon himself.

The case

The case would be a difficult one for any judge. Some of the difficulties include:

- all of the lower courts were evidently, unable to decide,
- there were no eyewitnesses,
- the disputants were both of the same questionable character (that is, it was one harlot’s word against another’s),
- the testimonies were evenly balanced,
- both women were passionate in their testimony.

Can you see this scene? Tempers are enraged; shouts are going back and forth. I imagine they are pulling and tugging at this little boy and saying, “He’s mine!”

“No! He’s mine!”

The baby is probably crying and the women are probably crying too, and begging the king to see it their way. The future of this boy is at stake. Young Solomon must make a decision. If I had been him, I would have said, “I didn’t ask for this job. I never went to law school.”

The judgment

Solomon, however, makes the judgment. Look at verses 23 through 27.

Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son who is living, and your son is the dead one’; and the other says, ‘No! For your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one.’”

The king said, “Get me a sword.” So they brought a sword before the king.

(Imagine that!)

The king said, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.”

Then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king, for she was deeply stirred over her son and said, “Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him.” But the other said, “He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!”

(Oops!)

Then the king answered and said, “Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him. She is his mother.”

What an incredible perception of maternal instincts! This shocking solution could kill the remaining child. But Solomon, with wisdom and discernment beyond his young years, knew he could count on the tender love of the real mother. Her concern for the safety of her child would surface and identify her. The real mother would be the one who would be willing to lose her child in order that he might live.

Where did Solomon get that wisdom? There was no doubt in anyone’s mind. Notice verse 28.

When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.

In other words, the wisdom of Solomon was clearly defined as a gift from God.

Look at I Kings, chapter 3, verse 12b.

. . . God said, "Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart . . ."

Then, look again at verse 28, the last part.

. . . they saw that the wisdom of God was in him . . ."

Look at chapter 4, verse 29a.

Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind . . ."

Turn further to chapter 5, verse 12a.

The Lord gave wisdom to Solomon, just as He promised him . . ."

The point is, you do not learn this discernment in law school; you do not receive wisdom with an engineering degree or a Masters degree in sociology, the source is God.

Wisdom . . . Across the Board!

Now, the rest of the next chapter informs us that Solomon's wisdom extended beyond the judge's bench. We will call this, "Wisdom . . . across the board!"

Three Key Words

Look at I Kings, chapter 4, verse 29a, again. There are three key words that are given to us in this verse.

Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind . . ."

Wisdom

The first key word is "wisdom," or "chokmah," in Hebrew. It can be defined as, "looking at life from God's point of view". Solomon wrote, in Proverbs, chapter 15, verse 33a,

The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom . . ."

Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective!

Now I know this may sound trite and a lot like some "sound bite," but notice that Solomon said, "The fear, or reverence, of the Lord is the instruction, or manual, for wisdom". That means that you do not have to read the latest Christian bestseller in order to

be wise; you do not have to go to the most popular seminars or catch up on the latest devotional technique. If you want wisdom, worship God; get to know God.

Discernment

The second key word for what God gave to Solomon is "discernment," or "binah," in Hebrew. This means, "insight," and it concerns the ability to distinguish between truth and error, between the valid and invalid. If wisdom is seeing life from God's perspective, then discernment is, "responding to life with God's perspective".

Discernment is the sister of wisdom. It helps to interpret the events of life correctly.

I love the story that someone sent to the *Reader's Digest*. Now, I have had several people tell me how grateful they are that I do not preach from the *Reader's Digest*, and I do not, but I will use it this morning to illustrate a point!

Virginia Spring, a middle aged housewife, was seated in the family room with her family. They were gathered around the television watching the arrival of Pope John Paul II. As they watched the Pope step from the plane, he stooped and symbolically kissed the ground. Virginia's eighty year old aunt turned to her and loudly whispered, "I know just how he feels. I hate to fly, too."

What a hilarious interpretation! And she was dead wrong! But misinterpreting the important events of life is not funny, it is tragic. People do it every day. Wisely interpreting the events of life is a byproduct of wisdom!

Breadth of mind

Verse 29 goes on to give us the third key word, or phrase. Notice the middle of the verse.

Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore.

"Breadth of mind," or "largeness of mind," refers to a breadth of interests.

Let us take a look at some of those interests. Look further in I Kings, chapter 4, at verse 33a.

He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall . . ."

This phrase, by the way, is a categorical expression. Ancient rankings put the cedar tree at the top of the list of plants and the hyssop at the lowest level. Solomon's botanical interests, therefore, were all-inclusive. In other words, Solomon had studied the entire range

Notice in verse 33b,

... he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish.

One author said this,

Solomon was the founder, the only representative, not merely of Hebrew wisdom, but of Hebrew science. We should understand him to be, among many other things, the first great naturalist of the world, in the midst of his kingdom's collections.

Now, the reference to Solomon speaking about these things was more than mere observation. He was not saying that some animal has four legs, drinks water, and likes to climb trees. Wisdom relates knowledge to God, the creator. Solomon related that plant and animal world to people, so that they had a better understanding and awe of their creator God. To Solomon, these things were more than the knowledge of brute facts, it was the relationship of the knowledge to God. That, ladies and gentlemen, is wisdom.

The problem with scientific and artistic advancement today is that it is not correlated with a creator God. As a result, we are taking knowledge that we have learned and are coming to the wrong conclusion. That is why, for example:

- art can be blasphemous and pornographic, yet protected as free speech;
- a tree can be given greater rights than a land owner;
- a spotted owl can be considered more important than the livelihood of people;
- churches officially pronounce blessings on cats and dogs.

The world of nature is a wonderful world and we should be wise and careful stewards. However, if we learn without ever relating our knowledge from the scriptures to our creator God, then, eventually, trees will have feelings and dogs will have souls.

Am I raising a controversy yet?! I certainly did not get this out of the *Reader's Digest!*

Relating the created world to the believer is exactly what Jesus Christ did with the crowd who came to hear Him preach. As recorded in Matthew, chapter 6, verses 25 through 34, He said to his audience, in effect, "Why are you so worried about whether or not you will have anything to eat or to wear; God has provided a visual illustration of His faithfulness. Haven't you noticed the feeding patterns of the birds lately? They don't store anything in barns, nor plow the fields, yet the Father provides. And have you noticed the beautiful wild flowers? They don't spin their clothing, or paint their petals, the Creator did that. So, if the Father can take care of them, He can take care of you."

Franky Schaeffer, son of Francis Schaeffer, brings out an interesting point. This is a point that Solomon must have revealed in.

If, from this world around us, we can learn anything about God's character, surely it is that we have a creative God, a God of diversity, a God whose interest in beauty and detail must be unquestioned. We could have lived in an uninteresting, flat world, one that had the bare minimum of gray ingredients to support life, one whose diversity was only enough to provide the minimum of existence. Instead, we live in a riotous explosion of diversity and beauty. We live in a world with millions of species, we live in a world peopled by individuals of infinite variety, talents, abilities, shapes and colors. And when one looks heavenward and sees the complexity of the reaches of space above us, the mind boggles at the creativity of our God.

Now, the account of Solomon informs us that his breadth of mind included many interests. A list of his interests was compiled by several authors who studied all of his writings. Although this is not a comprehensive list, his interests include:

- natural history,
- botany,
- ornithology,
- astronomy,
- geometry,
- medicine,
- music,
- poetry,

- writing, and
- architecture.

Solomon's architecture projects included: houses, reservoirs, gardens, parks, orchards, and vineyards. His crowning achievement, of course, was the golden temple.

It is amazing to me that a man could be so well versed in so many subjects. I tend to identify with the person who did well in spelling and history, but struggled with math and science.

I appreciate the story Chuck Swindoll once told about an elementary student who took a test in anatomy and failed. This is what the young student had written on his test, "The human body is composed of three parts – the brainery, the borax, and the abominable cavity." (This poor kid is groping for straws, isn't he?!) "The brainery contains the brain. The borax contains the lungs and the living things. The abominable cavity contains the bowels of which there are five: a, e, i, o, and u!"

I will bet anything though, that this kid was good at spelling!

Now, the text goes on, in I Kings, chapter 4, verse 30, to say that,

Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.

Egypt was known for its wisdom literature.

Solomon's wisdom also, according to verse 31, exceeded several specific individuals who were highly regarded in Solomon's day. They were:

- ***Ethan the Ezrahite***, whose name appears in the title of Psalm 89, and is presumed to have written that Psalm.
- ***Heman***, who, according to I Chronicles, chapter 15, was a musician.
- ***Calcol and Darda***, whom we do not know anything about, except that they, evidently, represented men of great knowledge and wisdom.

These were the Pulitzer prize winners; the Nobel prize winners; the Aristotles; the Einsteins. They were the brilliant thinkers of Solomon's day. And Solomon surpassed them all!

Verse 32 informs us that,

He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.

Now, since the book of Proverbs contains only 800 verses and the Song of Solomon includes only a few songs, in addition to Psalms 72 and 127, this wise king must have been responsible for much that has not been preserved. Wouldn't you like to have the other 2,000 proverbs that he wrote? Well, God did not preserve for us everything that Solomon wrote, but He preserved enough of what he wrote to adequately equip us for life.

Wisdom . . . For the Believer!

I want to follow some of the clues that Solomon gave us that will allow us to have wisdom and discernment for today. We will call this, "Wisdom . . . for the believer!"

The question is not, "Do I need wisdom?" but, "How can I afford to live without it and how do I get it?!"

I will tell you in advance, it is a matter of heart! Approximately eighty times in the book of Proverbs, Solomon refers to the heart.

The Greek word for heart is "kardia," from which we get words like, "cardiology". Gerhard Kittel, in his massive, scholarly, nine-volume work on Greek words, which takes nearly three feet of bookshelf space in my library, wrote, that the Old and New testament idea for the heart was that it occupied the main function of spiritual life; the place in human beings at which God bore witness to Himself. The heart was the dwelling place for feelings, emotions, desires, and passions. It was the biblical seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection. It was the seat of the will and the source of decision making.

You know the old saying, "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap your character. Sow your character, reap your destiny."

Solomon himself, said it best in Proverbs, chapter 23, verse 7a, as translated in the King James Version,

. . . as he thinketh in his heart, so he is . . .

In Solomon's proverbs, he alludes to many kinds of hearts that reveal many kinds of people. Here are a few, with their reference in Proverbs:

reverent (3:5),	cheerful (15:15),
crafty (6:18),	righteous (15:28),
cunning (7:10),	glad (15:30),
sensual (7:25),	surrendered (16:1),

teachable (10:8), joyful (17:22),
deceptive (12:20), haughty (18:12),
hopeless (13:12), angry (19:3),
grieving (14:13), proud (21:4),
contented (14:30), pure (22:11),
understanding (14:33), envious (23:17).

What determines the kind of heart we will have? Believe it or not, we have to start with our ears. Look at Proverbs, chapter 12, verse 15, as Solomon relates wisdom to listening.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

Look further at chapter 13, verse 1.

A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

Continue to chapter 15, verses 31 and 32.

He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.

In the beginning of Proverbs, in chapter 1, verses 2 through 3a, Solomon stated that his collection of sayings was to allow us,

To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior . . .

The word "receive," means, "to welcome instruction for wise behavior like you would welcome a dear friend into your home". All of these verbs; that is, "know, discern, and receive," imply that we are not talking, we are listening.

A person who becomes wise had to, at some point in time, realize that he was not! And he then, stopped talking, and started listening.

Proverbs, chapter 1, verse 5, continues by saying,
A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel

A person is not considered wise because he knows everything, but rather because he is willing to learn more.

My dear mother used to make it very simple for my three brothers and me to understand this principle. She would often say, "God gave you two ears, but

only one mouth, so listen twice as much as you speak."

I used to hate that!

One of Dallas Seminary's well-known, scholarly faculty members, Dr. Bruce Waltke, was the professor of Old Testament. He once said that, if he had to choose one book out of the entire Bible to serve as his guide for life, it would be the book of Proverbs. And, he added that, if he had to choose one chapter over all the rest, he would choose Proverbs, chapter 2.

Chapter 2 begins with an invitation to wisdom. Please turn there and notice verses 1 and 2a.

My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom . . .

In other words, "Listen to me."

Look at verses 4 through 6a.

If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom . . .

Right! He gives it to those who want it!

Did you notice the passion of this person's search? Verse 3a says,

. . . if you cry for [wisdom] . . .

Verse 4 uses the words, "seek," "search," meaning literally, "to dig out".

We tend to treat the Bible like a magazine in a doctor's waiting room. We flip through a few pages, look at the pictures, and skim the headlines. But that is not how to treat this Book!

If you want wisdom, you have to become a wisdom hunter; you have to become a wisdom archaeologist who patiently digs and carefully observes. Have you ever thought about the fact that an archaeologist on a dig and a hunter in the forest are not usually doing a lot of talking? Instead, they are doing a lot of looking and listening.

One wise sage once wrote, "I have often regretted my speech, never my silence."

So, a search for wisdom is a matter of the heart, but it relies heavily upon the ears. The search for wisdom also, and I will take it one step further, ends with the feet. Whether or not you are a wise person will not be revealed in how much you know, but in the way you live.

Solomon put it into perspective when he wrote, in Proverbs, chapter 16, verse 9,

The mind of man plans his way, . . .

(notice the implied submission),

. . . but the Lord directs his steps.

You could refer to this as making your plans for life, but giving to God a big eraser; one that He alone, has the right to use. This allows God to direct us.

Do our busy lives ever need directing? Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus Christ was always busy, and He was the wisest man to ever touch planet earth? Look at his three and a half years of ministry. They were a whirlwind and He was always busy, but he was never sidetracked! I want Him to direct my steps, don't you?!

Encouragement For the Wisdom Hunter

For those who want to hunt wisdom down and dig it out of the word, I want to encourage you with three final observations. These are words to the wise, dug from the source of wisdom.

Having a heart of wisdom is merely a return to the basics

1. Having a heart of wisdom is merely a return to the basics.

Take a close look at your heart. Make sure your ears are open and your mouth is closed. Look at the direction your feet are pointing. Where did they take you recently? Where will they take you tomorrow?

Having a heart of wisdom is not inevitable, but it is available

2. Having a heart of wisdom is not inevitable, but it is available!

Where do you think Solomon first learned that wisdom was a matter of the heart? Well, listen to a lesson in his father, David's, collection of Psalms. Look at Psalm, chapter 90, verse 12, which was a prayer of Moses.

So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

This is interesting! There is a relationship between understanding the brevity of life and having wisdom.

That may sound morbid, but it actually works. Do you remember a time when you were in an accident or in the hospital? How did your perspective on life become much wiser?!

I was in the home of a couple in our church. The husband has preached for me a couple of times. He was hit head-on, while riding a bicycle, by a drunk driver. He literally crashed, head first into the windshield, and the car carried him about one hundred feet before he fell off. For three and a half hours, his wife told me, she did not know if he was alive or dead.

We sat in their den and talked. He is frail, but is gaining his strength back and it looks as if he will recover with only a few scars. As I sat and listened to them talk about this experience, I gained a wiser perspective. And, it happens to all of us.

I want to tell you something that Dr. Waltke also did. He took this verse, Psalm, chapter 90, verse 12, and applied it literally. Dr. Waltke created a calendar that worked backwards from the age of 75. He would tear off a page each morning that would tell him how many days he had left.

Since I just had a birthday, I re-calculated my backward calendar. It tells me that, if I live to be 75, I have 13,870 days left. If you are 40, you have roughly, 12,000 days left. If you are 50, you have about 9,000 days left. If you are 65, you have only around 3,600 days to go.

Whether you have 13,000 or 3,000 days left, it does not sound like much, does it? It makes you want to reach for this Book of wisdom, does it not, and hold on tightly.

Having a heart of wisdom is not inevitable, but it is available!

Having a heart of wisdom is not developed by what you know, but by Who you know

3. I have one more word of encouragement for the wisdom hunters, and that is, having a heart of wisdom is not developed by what you know, but by Who you know and follow.

I want to close by reading from Proverbs, chapter 2. Listen to verses 6 through 11.

For the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,

guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones.

Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course.

For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to you soul;

discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you

That is enough said! Let us go hunting, and remember, the hunt begins at the heart. Wisdom, is a matter of the heart!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/11/1995 by Stephen Davey.

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