

## GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

**DISCUSS:** Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 92** and ask **Question #1: If you could be the leading expert in any field, what would it be?**

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 93** and point out that because of the Internet we have access to vast amounts of information about virtually any subject. But note there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom.

**SAY:** “We are swimming in an ocean of knowledge while dying of thirst for wisdom.”

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 93: Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.**

**PRAY:** Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God for discernment in making judgments and decisions in everyday life.

## SESSION 2

# SOLOMON: UNFAILING WISDOM



### ***The Point***

Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.

### ***The Bible Meets Life***

We do not lack knowledge; in fact, we are overwhelmed with knowledge. We may not have it stored in our heads, but we have

easy access with just a click of the mouse. What we lack is understanding of the best way to use that knowledge—and that calls for wisdom. Because God is the ultimate source of everything we can know, wisdom begins by looking to Him. As Solomon wrote, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10).

### ***The Passages***

1 Kings 3:3-14; 4:29-34

### ***The Setting***

As King David’s death approached, a power struggle arose concerning who would become the next king. His son Adonijah set himself up to succeed his father as king. Bathsheba, David’s wife, appealed to David to name their son Solomon to be the next king. The prophet Nathan joined her in intervening on Solomon’s behalf, and David granted their request. As David neared death, he gave final instructions to Solomon, urging him to live in God’s ways, keeping His law. Following David’s death, the Lord appeared to Solomon.

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## 1 Kings 3:3-9

**3** Solomon loved the LORD by walking in the statutes of his father David, but he also sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

**4** The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there because it was the most famous high place. He offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

**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?”

**KEY WORDS: High places** (3:3)—Elevated sites that had been Canaanite places of worship. God had directed the Israelites to destroy the high places (Num. 33:52), but they had not done so, often worshiping there instead.

**A youth** (3:7)—The Hebrew word was used of newborns, little boys, and males of marriageable age. It does not specify a definite age and likely sometimes has the sense of immaturity.

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### 1 Kings 3:3-9



10 minutes

**LEADER PACK:** Point to **Item 8: Map Overview** to show where these events occurred.



**SUMMARIZE:** Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Bible Meets Life** and **The Setting** on page 100. Read Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 3:3-9

**SUMMARIZE:** Use Bible

**Commentary 1** on page 101 and this page to give insight on the following statements:

- *Solomon loved the Lord*
- *He followed after the the statutes of his father, David*
- *He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places*
- *He sacrificed at Gibeon*
- *He offered a thousand burnt offerings*

**GUIDE:** Refer members to

**Key Words** on page 101 (PSG p. 94) to give insight on the phrase *high places*.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use Bible

**Commentary 2** on this page and page 103 to explain what God offered to Solomon and how he responded:

- *Refer to 2 Samuel 7:8-16 to the covenant God made with David*
- *Explain the significance of dreams*
- *Define “faithful love”*
- *Point out the attributes of David in verse six*
- *Solomon was young, with no leadership experience*

*Pray for wisdom and discernment.*

**1** ▶ **Verse 3.** Solomon followed David’s final instructions to him; he evidenced his love for God by living according to the **statutes** David had followed—the commandments God had given. For more information on the phrase **but he also sacrificed and burned incense on the high places**.

**Verse 4.** Solomon **went to Gibeon to sacrifice**. The tabernacle the Israelites had constructed in the wilderness and had brought into Canaan was in Gibeon. With the bronze altar also placed there, Gibeon **was the most famous high place**. In fact, the name *Gibeon* means “hill place.”

Solomon **offered a thousand burnt offerings** on the bronze altar at Gibeon. Burnt offerings were made morning and evening and on special occasions. They required perfect animals: young bulls, lambs, goats, turtledoves, or pigeons. The whole offering was consumed as an offering to God, which signified the individual was offering himself. This type of sacrifice was designed to provide forgiveness of sins and to restore a right relationship with God. Solomon’s sacrifices likely represented his petition that God bless his reign. ◀

**2** ▶ **Verse 5.** On one of Solomon’s pilgrimages to Gibeon, **the LORD (Yahweh, the covenant God) appeared to him in a dream**. In 2 Samuel 7:8-16, God made a covenant with David in which He promised to establish the kingdom of David’s descendant and God would establish David’s throne forever. As Solomon slept, the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God communicated with him in a dream. In the Old Testament, dreams were one channel of revelation from God, and kings’ dreams were especially important. God invited Solomon to request a gift from Him.

**Verse 6.** Solomon began his response to God’s offer with an affirmation of the Lord’s covenant faithfulness. The phrase **faithful love** translates a Hebrew word that almost defies definition. It can be translated “goodness,” “covenant love,” “kindness,” or “loving kindness.” It is close to the New Testament concept of grace. Such love is **great** in its persistence and extent. Through the centuries since the covenant’s inception, the Israelites had broken it. Yet God had remained faithful to it. Even when David had sinned, God had proved to be consistently loyal to him.

God had shown loving kindness to David because

he lived out his relationship with God. David's life was characterized by **faithfulness** (steadfastness, trust in God), **righteousness** (just character and conduct), and **integrity** (rightness in God's estimation, pleasing to Him). Solomon was acutely aware that God had been faithful to His covenant with David by placing Solomon on Israel's throne as an extension of David's kingdom. God was establishing David's throne as He promised.

**Verse 7.** The king addressed God as **LORD my God**, acknowledging Him as the covenant God and as sovereign. With the use of **my**, Solomon stressed his relationship with God. The king expressed humility by calling himself God's **servant**, His subject ready to do His bidding.

Solomon expressed modesty by referring to himself as **a youth**. The word expresses a range of ages somewhere between 12 and 20. Solomon may have used the term to indicate his awareness of his inexperience and his inadequacy for his responsibilities. He had **no experience in leadership**; literally, he did not know "to go out and in"—how to conduct himself among the people and administer the nation's affairs. ◀

**3 ▶ Verses 8-9.** Solomon acknowledged he needed God's help due to his inexperience so he asked for **a receptive heart** (literally, "a hearing heart"). In Hebrew thought, the heart was the center of a person's life, the seat of intellect, will, and emotions. Solomon requested that at the center of his life, he consistently would recognize and obey God's leading. In effect, he asked for wisdom. Practical wisdom would enable Solomon **to judge** his people. **To discern between good and evil** (right and wrong) probably referred to making sound legal decisions. He would be called on to decide hard, complex cases and would need insight to render right verdicts. Solomon's role as king overwhelmed him. He did not have the innate ability to perform such a daunting task, and he asked God to help him.

As a part of our daily prayers, asking for wisdom and discernment will help us conduct ourselves well as God's representatives. On our own, we will fail to do so. With God's help, we can develop an openness to Him and keen insight that will be enable us to make wise choices. He can enable us to be useful, productive servants. ◀

**GUIDE:** Refer members to **Key Words** on page 101 (**PSG p. 94**) and explain the phrase *a youth*.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 3** to define these terms:

- *a receptive heart*
- *judge your people*
- *discern between good and evil*

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG page 95** and ask a volunteer to read beginning with the paragraph that starts: "So there Solomon was, ..." to the end of the page.

**DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 96): What's the difference between wisdom and book smarts?**

*(Alternate: If God said to you "Ask. What should I give you?" what would you request?)*

**TRANSITION:** "In the next verses we will see God's response to Solomon's request."

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### 1 Kings 3:10-14



10 minutes

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 3:10-14.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3  
(PSG, p. 97): **When has God given you more than you asked for?**

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG page 97** to the following points:

- *The request was made humbly.*
- *The request made much of God.*
- *The request was for the sake of others.*

**SAY:** "Solomon's request for a receptive heart pleased God."

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 4** to explain:

- *Discernment*
- *God granted his request*
- *God gave him more*

## 1 Kings 3:10-14

**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."

**God give us wisdom.**

**4** ▶ **Verses 10-11.** Solomon's request for practical wisdom **pleased** God. God commended him for his choice. Instead of asking for **long life, riches**, or the destruction of enemies, the king had requested **discernment ... to administer justice**. Discernment was perception and insight. The term **administer** had the sense of receptiveness to hear God. Solomon wanted the ability to render fair judgments in cases brought to him. He wanted to be sensitive to God's leading and to have the necessary insight to decide rightly.

**Verse 12.** Because of Solomon's choice, God would grant his request. God would make Solomon skillful in administering justice and give him perception in reaching decisions. God would elevate Solomon to unprecedented greatness. That **there [had] never been anyone like [Solomon] before and never [would] be again** has been interpreted to refer to the entire human race or to Israel's kings.



**Verse 13.** God's response to Solomon's choice went far beyond what the king could have imagined. Solomon had not asked for **riches and honor**, but God would give him both. Solomon's later wealth was not attributed to his trading skills but to God's gift of wisdom. As long as Solomon lived, no other kingdom's leader would attain Solomon's stature.

**Verse 14.** God's third gift to Solomon would hinge on a condition. God would give him **a long life** if he lived according to God's **ways** and obeyed His **statutes and commands** as David had done. God's ways referred to manner of life. Solomon would need to follow God's guidelines for his life and render faithful service to Him. God's statutes or decrees were what was due Him. His commands were the code of law He had given the Israelites. God gives wisdom to His people when they ask and are open to receive it (see Jas. 1:5). He imparts it to us through the Scriptures and through the Holy Spirit, who helps us understand the Scriptures. ◀

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## 1 Kings 4:29-34

**29** God gave Solomon wisdom, very great insight, and understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore.

**30** Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.

**31** He was wiser than anyone — wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, sons of Mahol. His reputation extended to all the surrounding nations.

**32** Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005.

**33** He spoke about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop growing out of the wall. He also spoke about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish.

**34** Emissaries of all peoples, sent by every king on earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to listen to Solomon's wisdom.

**DISCUSS: Question #4**  
**(PSG, p. 98): Where in your own life do you need wisdom?**

*(Alternate: How do we gain wisdom and apply it in our daily lives?)*

**TRANSITION:** "Solomon's request for wisdom was granted by God. Wisdom became what Solomon was known for, wisdom became second nature to him."

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### 1 Kings 4:29-34



**15 minutes**

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 4:29-34.

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:** Write the following phrase on a white board or piece of paper:  
*I need God's wisdom in this area of my life:*

.....

.....

Encourage members of the group to make this their prayer request in the week to come.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 5** to give further explanation to what God gave to Solomon:

- *wisdom*
- *insight*
- *understanding*
- *as vast as the seashore*
- *greater wisdom than any other person*
- *reputation for wisdom*
- *people from everywhere came to listen to his wisdom*

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG pages 99-100** to show who benefits from wisdom:

- *Families benefit*
- *Churches benefit*
- *Communities benefit*

### *Others benefit when we share God's wisdom.*

On awakening from sleep, Solomon knew God had encountered him in his dream. The king's response was to worship. First Kings 3:16-28 chronicles Solomon's dramatic application of God's gift of wisdom. The report of Solomon's wisdom spread and the people realized the king was endowed with God's wisdom that enabled him to judge rightly.

**5** ▶ **Verse 29.** The writer of 1 Kings emphasized God's following through in fulfilling Solomon's request for guidance in ruling Israel. God gave him **wisdom**—administrative skill, shrewdness, and cleverness. He had the practical ability to decide the best course of action. God also gave Solomon **very great insight**—literally, “exceeding much” keen perception that allowed him to solve knotty problems. The capacity of **understanding**—literally, “breadth (or largeness) of heart”—was the comprehensive ability to absorb diverse factual information. The phrase **as vast as the sand on the seashore** was a common expression that indicated something beyond numbering or measuring, an incredible abundance (Genesis 22:17; 32:12).

**Verse 30.** Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all others. The phrase **the people of the East** could refer to the inhabitants of Arabia or Babylonia. An alternate suggestion is that the reference is to the tribes that lived southeast of the Dead Sea. Solomon's wisdom also exceeded that of the Egyptians. The phrase **all the wisdom of Egypt** was meant to indicate the tremendous scope of Egyptian knowledge. The Egyptians were famous for their wisdom, which “extended over the most diverse branches of knowledge, such as geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and astrology.”<sup>1</sup> Their knowledge also extended to the areas of medicine and natural science. Solomon's surpassing Egyptian knowledge occurred because of God's gift to him.

**Verse 31.** No other person was equal to or superior to Solomon in the area of wisdom. The writer of 1 Kings named four individuals who were renowned for their wisdom. The name *Ethan* means “long-lived”; the name *Heman* means “faithful”; and the name *Darda* may mean “pearl of knowledge.” (The meaning of *Calcol* is uncertain.) The word *Mahol* means “place of dancing” and could refer to

an occupation or an orchestral guild—men who danced as part of worship rituals. The three men listed may have been members of a group dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. Whatever their specific identities, all four men apparently were focused on the pursuit of knowledge and were well-known for being wise. Solomon’s **reputation** for exceptional wisdom spread to the nations around Israel.

**Verse 32.** Solomon was a prolific writer, composing **3,000 proverbs** and **1005 psalms or songs**. Proverbs were short, pithy statements drawn from experience that gave insight for godly living. Psalms included songs of praise, thanksgiving, lament, repentance, and petition and were often used in worship. Some psalms imparted wisdom and had a teaching purpose. Solomon has been associated with much of the wisdom literature in Israel. His name became connected to the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). The Book of Psalms includes two songs attributed to him (Pss. 72; 127).

**Verse 33.** Solomon’s writings encompassed varying subjects. He wrote about a broad range of **trees**, from the cedars of Lebanon to hyssop, a small bushy plant. He also wrote about animals, which the Hebrews divided into four classes: **animals, birds, reptiles, and fish**. Thus, his research included the natural world’s flora and fauna. Solomon’s interests and observations were quite comprehensive.

**Verse 34.** The writer of 1 Kings highly stressed Solomon’s reputation for superior wisdom. Much as we sometimes say, “The whole town was there,” or “Everybody agrees,” the writer used the phrases **all peoples** and **every king on earth** for emphasis. Rulers of territories outside Israel **had heard** about Solomon’s great **wisdom** and had sent representatives to **listen** as he taught his wisdom. God had done what Solomon asked earlier at Gibeon—and then some.

*Knowledge* has been defined as gathering facts; *wisdom* has been defined as proper application of those facts. Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge. Recipients of God’s gift of wisdom are not the only ones who benefit from that gift. When recipients express wisdom, others benefit. Wise people share their wisdom humbly and tactfully, not arrogantly or with a superior attitude. Truly wise people seek others’ best interests. Receiving wisdom from God carries the responsibility to help others make wise decisions. In doing so, wise individuals strengthen relationships. ◀

1. C. F. Keil, “The Books of the Kings” in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd.) 55.

#### **DISCUSS:** Question #5

**(PSG, p. 100): How do you maintain a balance between sharing God’s wisdom and avoiding offering unwanted advice?**

*(Alternate: What makes wisdom attractive and causes others to seek it out?)*

**DO:** Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity, **“Nuggets of Godly Wisdom”** on **PSG page 100**.



**LIVE IT OUT****5 minutes**

**GUIDE:** Emphasize **The Point:**  
**Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.**

**REVIEW:** Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 101)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

**WRAP IT UP**

**GUIDE:** Emphasize that wisdom from God is available to all who need it and ask. James 1:5 says: “Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and wholeheartedly—and it will be given to him.”

**PRAY:** “Father, give us wisdom. We need Your wisdom for discernment in every area of our lives.”

**LIVE IT OUT**

Knowledge is out there—more than you or I know what to do with. But while knowledge might increase our prominence or reputation, wisdom is to be more treasured than gold. Humbly pray for wisdom and trust the God who is generous in answering.

- ▶ **Read.** True wisdom is found in reading God’s Word. Commit yourself to read one chapter from the Book of Proverbs each day this month.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Memorize Proverbs 9:10, a proverb written by Solomon: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”
- ▶ **Meet.** Who is one person whose wisdom you could benefit from? Contact that person and request to meet one on one so that you can learn from his or her insights. Or consider being a mentor to someone who could benefit from the wisdom God has given you.



BIBLICAL  
**ILLUSTRATOR**



Solomonic gate leading into Megiddo. The section below the horizontal board is original; above, reconstructed.

The coronation of Solomon marked a milestone in Israel's history. Sovereignty over all twelve tribes was passed peacefully at the death of the king. It would never happen again.

Solomon's ascension to the throne had no basis other than he was God's choice to rule the kingdom. In the steps Solomon took to secure his throne, he demonstrated wisdom and leadership. It demonstrated that at this point in his life, he acted decisively and judiciously.

Solomon aggressively pursued public works projects such as construction of his palace and Yahweh's temple. The infrastructure of Israel improved. The temple would serve as the heart of Israel's religion for centuries. Solomon established foreign political alliances that resulted in peaceful relations with Israel's neighbors.

The early years of Solomon's reign were known as Israel's "Golden Age." It was a time of peace and prosperity. Cultural achievements expanded. The king gained a reputation for his proverbs. In part this was due to his patronage of wisdom literature. Formal education and literary progress produced works such as those recorded in the biblical Books of Proverbs and Song of Songs.

To the elderly especially, the transformation of Israel must have seemed phenomenal. To the young, it signified Israel's rightful place in the world.

The excerpt above is from the article "Solomon in All His Splendor" (Summer 2007), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

## SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

*When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we have not only the knowledge we need, but the wisdom to live according to His design.*

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

**GROUPS  
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](#).

[LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)