

FIRST KINGS

Chapter 3

Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom

Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt. He took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. 2 The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD. 3 Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. 4 And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." 6 And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. 7 And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. 9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" 10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 11 And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, 12 behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. 13 I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. 14 And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." 15 And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

3:1 *made an alliance with Pharaoh.* It appears likely that Solomon established his marriage alliance with either Siamun or Psusennes II, the last kings of the 21st Egyptian dynasty (the first Egyptian pharaoh mentioned by name in the OT is Shishak—11:40; 14:25–26—who established the 22nd Egyptian dynasty c. 945 B.C.). Such an alliance attests Egyptian recognition of the growing importance and strength of the Israelite state. 1Ki 9:16 indicates that the pharaoh gave his daughter the Canaanite town of Gezer as a dowry at the time of her marriage to Solomon. Gezer was located near the crossing of two important trade routes. One, to the west of Gezer, went from Egypt to the north and was very important for Egypt's commercial interests. The other, to the north of Gezer, went from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean Sea and the port of Joppa and was important to Solomon as a supply line for his building projects. The marriage alliance enabled both Solomon and the pharaoh to accomplish important economic and political objectives. No precise date is given for the conclusion of the marriage alliance, though it appears to have occurred in the third or fourth year of Solomon's reign (see 2:39). Solomon began construction of the temple in his fourth year (6:1), and control of the Gezer area was important to him for the beginning of this project. (CSB)

Typical practice. Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess may not have occurred at the very outset of his regime. But it is an example of his general practice of marrying many foreign wives (11:1) for the sake of peace with neighbors. (TLSB)

City of David. The Egyptian princess was given a temporary residence in the old fortress until a separate palace of her own could be constructed some 20 years later (7:8; 9:10; 2Ch 8:11). (CSB)

3:2 high places. Upon entering Canaan, the Israelites often followed the Canaanite custom of locating their altars on high hills, probably on the old Baal sites. The question of the legitimacy of Israelite worship at these high places has long been a matter of debate. It is clear that the Israelites were forbidden to take over pagan altars and high places and use them for the worship of the Lord (Nu 33:52; Dt 7:5; 12:3). It is also clear that altars were to be built only at divinely sanctioned sites (see Ex 20:24; Dt 12:5, 8, 13–14). It is not so clear whether multiplicity of altars was totally forbidden provided the above conditions were met (see 19:10, 14; Lev 26:30–31; Dt 12; 1Sa 9:12). It seems, however, that these conditions were not followed even in the time of Solomon, and pagan high places were being used for the worship of the Lord. This would eventually lead to religious apostasy and syncretism and was strongly condemned (2Ki 17:7–18; 21:2–9; 23:4–25). (CSB)

Other prominent features of Solomon's career were his extensive building program and his tolerance in worship practices (cf 11:4–7). Directly or indirectly, all these things contributed to Solomon's fall, explaining in advance why "his heart had turned away from the LORD" (11:9). Historically, the downfall of the Egyptian and Hittite empires (c 1200 BC) cleared the way for David and Solomon to rise in power. These conditions continued until c 900 BC, when the Assyrians began to rise. The biblical account fits well into the broad historical setting. (TLSB)

because no house had yet been built. Worship at a variety of places was apparently considered normal prior to the building of the temple (see Jdg 6:24; 13:19; 1Sa 7:17; 9:12–13). (CSB)

3:3 loved the LORD. Despite the imperfections of his love for the Lord, Solomon received a special measure of divine grace. Given a choice of gifts, he asked for wisdom to govern his people (vv 3–9). By this request, he showed that in his heart he wanted to be motivated by the desire to serve God and His people rather than by the promptings of the flesh for personal gain. God gave him not only "a wise and discerning mind" but also promised him "both riches and honor" (vv 12–13), for all of which he was truly grateful (v 15). (TLSB)

made offering in high places. Solomon's one major fault early in his reign was inconsistency in meeting the Mosaic requirements concerning places of legitimate worship. (CSB)

3:4 Gibeon. The Gibeonites tricked Joshua and Israel into a peace treaty at the time of the conquest of Canaan (see Jos 9:3–27). The city was subsequently given to the tribe of Benjamin and set apart for the Levites (Jos 18:25; 21:17). David avenged Saul's violation of the Gibeonite treaty by the execution of seven of Saul's descendants (see 2Sa 21:1–9). (CSB)

No reason is given why Solomon went to sacrifice at "the great high place" in Gibeon, c 6 mi NW of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

great high place. The reason for Gibeon's importance was the presence there of the tabernacle and the ancient bronze altar (see 1Ch 21:29; 2Ch 1:2–6). These must have been salvaged after the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines (see note on 1Sa 7:1). (CSB)

a thousand. Denotes a large number rather than an exact count. (TLSB)

3:5 dream. Revelation through dreams is found elsewhere in the OT (see Ge 28:12; 31:11; 46:2; Nu 12:6; Jdg 7:13; Da 2:4; 7:1), as well as in the NT (see, e.g., Mt 1:20; 2:12, 22). (CSB)

One means of divine revelation (1Sm 28:6, 15), claimed also by false prophets (Jer 23:32; Zec 10:2). (TLSB)

Revelation through dreams was not a common occurrence, but was certainly not unheard of either. If there was any doubt that Solomon was the rightful king according to God, this encounter proved it. Solomon was now assured of God's presence and blessing. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 12, part 3)

by night. After his evening religious services. (TLSB)

3:6 steadfast love. The Hebrew for this word refers to God's covenant favors (see note on 2Sa 7:15). Solomon is praising the Lord for faithfulness to his promises to David (2Sa 7:8–16). (CSB)

This refers to the great and steadfast loving-kindness that God showed to David through the establishment of a dynasty (2 Sam 7:11-16) and through the forgiveness of sins (2 Sam 12:13). God has proved his faithfulness throughout all time, but especially now in keeping his promise to David was a chief recipient of the grace and mercy of God, in spite of his great sin and many failings. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 12, part 3)

because. See note on 2Sa 22:21- (*according to my righteousness.* In vv. 21–25 David refers to the Lord's deliverances as a reward for his own righteousness. While these statements may give the impression of self-righteous boasting and a meritorious basis for divine favor, they should be understood in their context as: (1) David's desire to please the Lord in his service as the Lord's anointed (see note on v. 51); (2) his recognition that the Lord rewards those who faithfully seek to serve him.) (CSB)

son to sit on his throne – That the son of David and Bathsheba would sit on the throne – considering their adultery – was further evidence of God's grace and mercy. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 12, part 3)

3:7 I am but a little child. The birth of Solomon is generally placed in approximately the middle of David's 40-year reign, meaning that Solomon was about 20 years old at the beginning of his own reign (see 2:11–12) and lacked experience in assuming the responsibilities of his office (cf. Jer 1:6). (CSB)

Solomon acknowledges both the size and greatness of the people he is to govern and his inexperience and youth. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 12, part 3)

Figure of speech to express lack of experience. Solomon actually had a child of his own at this time (cf. 11:42; 14:21). (TLSB)

do not know how to go out or come in – How to tackle the problems of administering “a great people” whose numbers were bewildering (v. 8; Dt 31:2). Luther says, “It is incurable and damnable rashness and arrogance on my part when I claim to be such a person and such an extraordinary man that I can manage the state, the home, and the church wisely and properly. But if you are judge, a bishop, or a prince, you should not feel ashamed to fall on your knees and say: ‘Lord God, Thou has appointed me...guide and teach me, give me counsel, wisdom, and strength to attend successfully to the office committed to me.’” (TLSB)

3:8 *great people, too many to be numbered.* From the small beginnings of a single family living in Egypt (see Ge 46:26–27; Dt 7:7), the Israelites had increased to an extent approaching that anticipated in the promise given to Abraham (Ge 13:16; 22:17–18) and Jacob (Ge 32:12). See 4:20. (CSB)

Hyperbole. David had conducted censuses, though not without issue (1Ch 21). (TLSB)

3:9 *I may discern* – This is “hearing or listening heart.” This is much more than a request for the proverbial wisdom “to listen twice as much as we speak because we have two ears and only one mouth.” This is godly listening, to listen first to God and his Word and then to act. This request is for spiritual discernment. Solomon acknowledges that true wisdom and understanding come from God alone. If he is to faithfully govern the people of God, he must always look to God for guidance and strength. Then and only then will he be a wise and faithful king. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 12, part 3)

Literally, “a hearing heart.” Hebrew verb “to hear” frequently means “to hearken, to obey” (cf 1 Sam 15:22). To act in obedience to God, Solomon wanted to be able to “discern between good and evil.” Such discrimination required a mind capable of analytic judgments. However, only a heart that listens to the Lord could supply the basis for making correct decisions, the desire to conform to the divine way, and the willpower to act accordingly. (TLSB)

3:10 *it pleased he Lord* – He granted not only the request for a discerning heart, but also granted honor and riches. God’s reaction to the prayer of Solomon is a foreshadowing of the words of Jesus in Mt. 6:33 (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 12, part 3)

3:11 *long life ... riches... life of your enemies.* Typical desires of ancient Near Eastern monarchs. (CSB)

asked...understanding to discern – Though David was a man after God’s own heart, he lacked judgment, which brought sorrow to his family and kingdom. (TLSB)

Jesus once said, “Seek first His [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [food, drink, clothing] will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). That is what happened here. (PBC)

3:12 *none like you.* God gave Solomon wisdom the likes of which this world had never see and would never see again. (PBC)

3:13 *I will also give you both riches and honor.* Cf. Jesus’ promise in Lk 12:31. (CSB)

Israel never grew greater economically or politically than under Solomon. His expanded power naturally diminished the territory and influence of his rivals. (TLSB)

3:14 *If you walk in my ways ... I will lengthen your days.* Echoes Dt 6:2; 17:20; 22:7. Unfortunately Solomon did not remain obedient to the covenant as his father David had (11:6), and he did not live to be much more than 60 years of age (see note on v. 7; cf. 11:42). (CSB)

3:15 *ark of the Lord’s covenant.* The Ten Commandments are called the “words of the covenant” in Ex 34:28. The stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed are called the “tablets of the covenant” in Dt 9:9. The ark in which the tablets were kept (see Ex 25:16, 21; 40:20; Dt 10:1–5) is thus sometimes called the “ark of the covenant of the LORD” (see Dt 10:8; 31:9, 25; Jos 3:11). Elsewhere the ark is variously designated as the “ark of the LORD” (Jos 3:13; 4:11), the “ark of the Testimony” (Ex 30:6; 31:7) and the “ark of God” (1Sa 3:3; 4:11, 17, 21; 5:1–2). (CSB)

David had brought it to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:16-17). (TLSB)

peace offerings. This type of offering was an important element in the original ceremony of covenant ratification at Sinai (Ex 24:5, 11). It represented the communion or peace between the Lord and his people when the people lived in conformity with their covenant obligations (see Lev 7:11–17; 22:21–23). (CSB)

made a feast. Rejoicing is the expression of people who have renewed their commitment to the Lord, confessed their sin (see 12:19) and been given a king.). (CSB)

A sacrificial meal in connection with the thank-offerings. To those who seek first of all the kingdom of God and His righteousness all other things are added by virtue of His free grace. (Kretzmann)

3:1–15 In return for Solomon’s selfless request for wisdom, God blesses him, not only with wisdom, but also with riches and honor. May we, like Solomon, recognize that we do not deserve the wonderful opportunities God gives us. Because of our human limitations, we are unable to perfectly fulfill the challenges we face. Yet, in Christ, we have forgiveness; we are a new creation and can do all things through Him who gives us strength and wisdom. • O Lord God, do not forsake me in my life of service, lest I bring it all to ruin. May Your Word, my constant companion, give me strength and wisdom. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)

3:16–4:28 The connection between vv 1–15 and what follows is logical rather than chronological. These verses demonstrate that Solomon actually received “an understanding mind” (v 9): (1) he was able to render justice in a difficult case (3:16–28); (2) he displayed executive ability by dividing the country into 12 administrative districts (4:1–19); (3) he “ruled over” a far-flung empire (4:20–21); (4) he managed a grandiose establishment (4:22–28). (TLSB)

Solomon's Wisdom

16 Then two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. **17** 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. **18** Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. And we were alone. There was no one else with us in the house; only we two were in the house. **19** And this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. **20** And she arose at midnight and took my son from beside me, while your servant slept, and laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. **21** When I rose in the morning to nurse my child, behold, he was dead. But when I looked at him closely in the morning, behold, he was not the child that I had borne.” **22** But the other woman said, “No, the living child is mine, and the dead child is yours.” The first said, “No, the dead child is yours, and the living child is mine.” Thus they spoke before the king. **23** Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead’; and the other says, ‘No; but your son is dead, and my son is the living one.’” **24** And the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So a sword was brought before the king. **25** And the king said, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.” **26** Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, “Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death.” But the other said, “He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him.” **27** Then the king answered and said, “Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.” **28** And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

3:16 *two prostitutes*. It is not known if these two were Israelites or Jebusites— possibly the latter. (CSB)

came to the king. It was possible for Israelites (and others within the realm) to bypass lower judicial officials (Dt 16:18) and appeal directly to the king (see 2Ki 8:3; 2Sa 15:2). (CSB)

3:17 *live in the same house*. Brothels were common in ancient Near Eastern cities. (CSB)

3:18 *no one else ... in the house*. No potential witnesses. (TLSB)

3:19–20 Newborn babies, born in a dark house to exhausted women, would be difficult to distinguish. (TLSB)

3:27 Solomon called on human instinct as a witness in the trial, knowing that the one who truly cared was the mother. (TLSB)

3:28 *they stood with awe of the king*. This episode strikingly demonstrated that the Lord had answered Solomon's prayer for a discerning heart (vv. 9, 12). (CSB)

3:16–28 Solomon's legendary wisdom is evident in his dealing with the two prostitutes who claim to have given birth to the same living child. True wisdom consists of far more than acquiring facts and information. Rather, it is godly wisdom to declare our sinfulness and need for a Savior, and to see in Jesus the One who meets all our needs. • Omniscient Lord, wisdom's highest treasure resides in Your Son, who is the very Wisdom of God. Guide me constantly to serve You faithfully. Amen. (TLSB)