# 1 Kings 3:11–28 — God’s Answer and Its Fruits

*What Was Not Asked, the Return to Jerusalem, the Offerings, Wisdom and Knowledge, and the Two Women*

---

## Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 3:11–28

---

> *“And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment… Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.*
>
> *And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.*
>
> *And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.*
>
> *Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged: and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.”*

## God Delights to Answer Prayer

---

When we pray, God hears. This passage is a magnificent demonstration of that. Solomon prayed for wisdom, and God answered — and then gave abundantly beyond what was asked. The three things God commends Solomon for not asking are instructive: long life, riches, and the life of his enemies. Each of these had been asked for by others in Scripture and answered. Hezekiah prayed for more years and received them. Jabez prayed for enlargement of his coasts and received it. Samson asked for strength one last time and received it. God graciously answered all those requests. The point is not that such prayers are wrong; the point is what they reveal about the heart that makes them. Solomon's heart was seeking to serve, not to preserve himself. That pleased the Lord.

James wrote: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." The double-minded man, like a wave of the sea, shall not think he will receive anything of the Lord. Solomon asked without wavering, with single-minded desire for the right thing, and the speech pleased the Lord.

## The If of Verse 14

God gave the wise and understanding heart freely, and gave also what Solomon had not asked — riches and honour. But length of days was set under a condition: "If thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." That if was precisely what Moses had written in Deuteronomy 17. God said to Solomon nothing more and nothing less than what the word had already said. The condition for length of days had been established at the beginning and had not changed.

Solomon reigned forty years, just as Saul had and David had before him. Each of those three reigns of forty years brought out a certain character — of Saul, of David, of Solomon — that God tested and that the forty years made evident. God gives time, and in the time given the character comes out. We should not

presume upon God’s patience: he gives rope, and eventually acts in judgment. The kindness of the Lord is that he gives space to repent; the danger is in taking that space for granted.

## Wisdom and Knowledge: Two Different Things

Wisdom and knowledge are not the same. Knowledge is an acquaintance with facts. Wisdom takes knowledge and uses it to advantage — but it can be used in two directions: to God’s advantage, or to one’s own. The Lord said the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. The capacity to use wisdom for self is real and terrible. Solomon at the beginning used it for God’s advantage: he asked for an understanding heart to judge the people, specifically to serve, not to advance himself.

William Kelly observed that David understood God’s heart, and Solomon understood man’s heart. That distinction illuminates both men. Understanding God’s heart — which came from David’s deep personal walk with God — kept David even through failure. Understanding man’s heart, which was Solomon’s great gift and so clearly displayed in the two-women case, was given to him for service to the people. But wisdom not guarded by daily personal appropriation of the word can turn to serve the flesh instead of God. There is wisdom from above and wisdom from below. The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable (James 3:17). Pure, in connection with God as light. Peaceable, in connection with God as love.

## Two Acts of Wisdom: Jerusalem Before the Ark

The chapter records two acts of wisdom on Solomon’s part, not just the one with the two women. The first is in verse 15: he awoke from the dream, and came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. The conversation had taken place at Gibeon, the great high place. But when Solomon

woke up and a wise heart had been given him, he moved — not back to his own house, not to some other high place, but to Jerusalem, where the ark was. He went to where his father had been. That is wisdom already beginning to operate: recognition of the right place over the convenient place.

And at Jerusalem he offered differently from Gibeon. At Gibeon there had been a thousand burnt offerings — no mention of peace offerings. Here at Jerusalem before the ark, there are burnt offerings and peace offerings together, and then a feast to all his servants. This is a more intelligent offering. The burnt offering is the offering of acceptance: the whole given over to God, Christ as the ground of our acceptance before him. The peace offering is the communion offering: the shared meal, the fellowship founded on the sacrifice. The two together express both acceptance and communion. And from them flows joy: the feast to all his servants. That is the right order — God first, then the feast. Worship before festivity.

This pairing appears in Scripture at moments of crisis and recovery. In Judges 20, after Israel had been twice defeated in the battle against Benjamin, Phinehas came forward and the burnt offering and peace offering were offered before the Lord asked, Shall I go up again? God said, Go up — and the victory came. The same two offerings appear at the end of chapter 21 after the victory. They bracket the great crisis, one before and one after. And in 1 Samuel 13, Saul’s presumption is exposed precisely at this point: he offered the burnt offering but was interrupted before the peace offering could be presented. He was not in communion with the Lord, and God withheld the peace offering from a man who had no right to offer it. The significance of the two offerings together, and the gravity of the one without the other, runs through the whole.

## The Two Women: Wisdom That Reaches the Heart

The case of the two women at the close of the chapter is the immediate illustration and proof of the wisdom God gave. Two mothers, two claims on one living child, no external evidence capable of resolving the dispute. Both said the same thing in opposite directions. No legal examination of witnesses, no physical evidence, no procedure of human wisdom could determine which was true. Human means were exhausted.

Solomon's solution was not a proposal to harm the child but a test designed to expose what was in each heart. Divide the child; give half to each. The true mother could not bear it. Her bowels yearned for her son. She surrendered her claim — give the child to her, do not slay it. The false mother agreed to the division: let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. The heart of each was laid bare not by their words, which had been identical, but by their response to an impossible demand. Motive was exposed when circumstance pressed hard enough.

All Israel saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment. It was recognized as God's wisdom because no human wisdom could have reached it. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him — and the fear of the Lord in which Solomon delighted at the beginning was the root of this discernment. First Corinthians 2:15 says the spiritual man discerns all things. That discernment does not come from biblical knowledge alone. It comes from walking with the Lord in the fear of him.

## The Sand of the Seashore: Wisdom Matched to the Task

Chapter 4:29 describes the wisdom God gave Solomon as "largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore." In Solomon's own prayer he had spoken of the people as "a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude." The wisdom given was matched to the magnitude of the people to be governed. Sand on the seashore was the same figure God used with Abraham for

the earthly seed — as distinct from the stars of heaven which speak of the heavenly seed. Solomon is an earthly king governing an earthly people, and his wisdom is earthly in character, immeasurable but fitted for the task of ruling the nation in the land.

## Solomon as Type: His Limits and What He Points To

Solomon is in many respects a type of the Lord Jesus in his millennial reign. The purging of the kingdom in chapter 2 — all offenses brought into judgment, the land cleansed — answers to Matthew 13 where the Lord gathers out of his kingdom all things that offend. The wisdom, the administration, the glory of chapter 4 reflect the order and glory of the coming kingdom. But Solomon is only a figure, and an imperfect one. He came profoundly short, especially at the end. What he figures is greater than he. Joseph may be the type of Christ in whom no recorded failure appears in the narrative. He too is a figure of rejection by his brethren and a Gentile bride taken in the time of that rejection, then a reign in which the brethren are received and reconciled. There is no Old Testament type of the body of Christ at all — there could be none. The mystery was kept hidden, and room was left in the types for what could only be understood after the full revelation came.

*They saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.*