

## 1 Kings 3-4

### Limits of the Text

1 Kings 3-4 is a complete literary unit. It begins with Solomon's worship of and love for the Lord, which leads to his request for wisdom. It ends with 4 examples of Solomon's new wisdom.

### Plot

Only parts of these two chapters contain stories per se. The main story reveals how Solomon got his wisdom (1 Ki 3:1-15). The first example of Solomon's wisdom, the prostitutes and the babies (1 Ki 3:16-28), is a story, but the other examples are not.

The main story:

1. Background – The people sacrificed at the high places (1 Ki 3:1-2).
2. Crisis – God offered Solomon anything he wanted (1 Ki 3:3-5).
3. Resolution – Solomon asked for wisdom (1 Ki 3:6-9).
4. Conclusion – God gave Solomon wisdom (1 Ki 3:10-15).

The first example:

1. Background – Two prostitutes brought a case before Solomon (1 Ki 3:16).
2. Crisis – They both claimed ownership of the same child (1 Ki 3:17-22).
3. Resolution – Solomon used a sword to determine the mother (1 Ki 3:23-27).
4. Conclusion – Everyone perceived the wisdom of God in Solomon (1 Ki 3:28).

### Towards Authorial Intent

The **pace** of chapter 3 slows down dramatically for Solomon's discussion with the Lord and again for the claims of the prostitutes, indicating that dialogue is key to understanding this chapter.

In the **dialogue** of chapter 3 the author captured the heart of the story. Solomon wanted the ability to discern between good and evil in order to govern (1 Ki 3:9), a request that pleased the Lord. In the end, all Israel perceived that he had the wisdom of God in order to do justice (1 Ki 3:28). A quick search of Scripture reveals that doing justice is a common Old Testament theme; God required it of Abraham (Ge 18:19), David begged God to do it (Ps 10:18), Solomon extolled it (Pr 21:3), and Isaiah (Is 1:17), Jeremiah (Je 22:3), and Micah (Mi 6:8) reiterated God's demand to do it.

Why was the Lord pleased? He was pleased because Solomon did not ask for something selfish or personal (like long life, riches, or dead enemies), but for something that

enabled him to be a good ruler, one who could do justice, thus working to fulfill God's promises to David. If the previous chapter highlighted those who worked against God's promises—Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab, and Shimei—then this chapter highlights how Solomon wanted to work with them.

Chapter 4 contains three more examples of Solomon's wisdom. The keys to these examples can be found in the summary statements for each section. 1 Ki 4:20 summarizes 1 Ki 4:1-19, stating that Judah and Israel were happy with the way Solomon ruled them. 1 Ki 4:21 summarizes 1 Ki 4:22-28, stating that Solomon ruled over and received tribute from the surrounding kingdoms. 1 Ki 4:29 summarizes 1 Ki 4:30-34, stating that Solomon's God-given wisdom had unsurpassed depth and breath.

### **External Context**

These are the first two chapters in the reign of Solomon. Having established his kingdom in 1 Ki 1 & 2, he began to reign with wisdom.

## Interpretation

3:1 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.<sup>1</sup>

In this opening paragraph, the author of Kings displays his mastery of foreshadowing; these verses describe Solomon's reign in a nutshell. Recall the context of the previous chapter. David had given his son advice on dispensing justice, which Solomon did well, but he had also charged his son to keep his obligation to God by walking in his ways and obeying the Mosaic Law. In the opening paragraph of chapter 2 the author let his readers know that Solomon kept this obligation also, but not as well.

Solomon formed an alliance with Egypt, cemented it by marrying Pharaoh's daughter, and took her to Jerusalem. How shall these actions be judged? If they are judged from a political point of view, then this is good news. David had built a significant kingdom by conquest; Solomon now "controlled virtually all the land between Egypt and the Hittite kingdom, [and he] was a major player in international affairs."<sup>2</sup> Egypt recognized Israel's significance, and Israel profited by the alliance.

But for God's people, actions are rarely judged by their political value alone. Especially in Kings, actions are more often judged by the Law of Moses. Intermarriage with foreigners was forbidden because they would tend to turn the children of Israel away from serving God to serving other gods (Dt 7:3-4). And looking ahead in the story, this is exactly what happened to Solomon: "For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Ki 11:4). 1 Ki 3:1 anticipates Solomon's many wives and his idolatry in 1 Ki 11:1-8.

The people sacrificed at high places, and Solomon did the same. High places were "shrines were located at slight elevations throughout the land, were quite often fairly elaborate in design and construction."<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, it appears that Solomon and Israel were genuinely worshipping God at these places; on the other hand, they had been commanded to destroy these places, forbidden from worshipping God there, and told to worship only at the tabernacle (Dt 12:1-7). "But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your

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<sup>1</sup> ESV.

<sup>2</sup> House, 107.

<sup>3</sup> House, 109.

sacrifices” (Dt 12:5-6). Israel should have destroyed all the high places and worshipped at the tabernacle alone. Eventually, Israel would worship foreign gods at these high places.

Yet the text also informs the reader that Solomon loved the Lord and walked in the statutes of David his father. So what was the author of Kings telling his readers? Although Solomon loved the Lord, he was a man with divided loyalties; his actions early in his reign indicate what will happen later on. Solomon had already sown the seeds that would eventually lead to the destruction of the nation.

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?”

The most prominent high place was at Gibeon; perhaps its prominence was due to the tabernacle being located there,<sup>4</sup> as noted in the parallel text, 1 Chr 1:3-7. So although Solomon did worship at high places, he also worshipped at the tabernacle and did so extravagantly.

It was here that God gave him the ultimate choice: Ask for anything! Why does God make such an offer? What has Solomon done to deserve this? Solomon’s response indicates that he had done nothing to deserve such an offer. God’s actions were based upon God’s steadfast love (*hesed*), his faithful and loyal keeping of the covenant,<sup>5</sup> and David’s right response. “Whatever opportunities Solomon may have are based firmly on God’s sovereign purpose for those who keep their covenant vows.”<sup>6</sup>

What covenants are in view? Solomon mentioned two. The more recent and more pertinent was the Davidic covenant, the one that enabled Solomon to sit on the throne (1 Ki 3:6). The other was the Abrahamic covenant, where God chose a people and promised to make them a great nation (1 Ki 3:8). These two covenants spanned a

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<sup>4</sup> Only the ark had been moved to Jerusalem (1 Ki 3:15).

<sup>5</sup> The NET translates it as “great loyalty.”

<sup>6</sup> House, 110.

thousand years of history! Solomon knew that God always keeps his promises, whether they are old or new. “Solomon’s prayer, then, is a proclamation of the fidelity of God.”<sup>7</sup> So Solomon made his request based upon God’s *hesed*.

God’s offer was also a test; it would give Solomon whatever he wanted, but it would also reveal what was in Solomon’s heart, what he desired most.<sup>8</sup> Solomon’s request was based upon the Davidic covenant and his own need. Although he was the king, he was a little child, a reference to his sense of inadequacy, who did not know how to go out or come in, a Hebrew idiom referring to a lack of leadership skill.<sup>9</sup> He was now ruling a large nation with many vassal states, and he needed help to govern well. So Solomon asked for a discerning mind. Mind refers to the inner man, including what we would call the mind, the will, and the heart today.<sup>10</sup> Discerning comes from a verb whose root means to hear; it has many nuances, including the ideas of listening to adjudicate matters, understanding and comprehending, and obeying what is required. Probably these were all going through Solomon’s mind. He needed to hear what his people asked, to comprehend the situation, to obey God’s laws—the only way to know what is good and what is evil—and to give right legal justice.

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.”

1 Kings 1 & 2 were about establishing the throne of newly founded Davidic dynasty. Some, like Nathan and Bathsheba, worked to accomplish God’s plan; others, like Adonijah, Abiathar, and Joab, worked against it. At this point in his reign, though he had divided loyalties, Solomon desired to work with God and fulfill his part of the covenant, specifically by ruling God’s people well. No wonder that God was pleased with this request.

Because his request was covenant-centric and not selfish, God voluntarily gave him what he did not ask for. This is God’s grace at work in order to bring more glory to himself.

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<sup>7</sup> Davis, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, 36.

<sup>9</sup> House, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, 524.

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.

It's unclear why Solomon returned to Jerusalem to worship God. Provan speculates that Solomon's newfound wisdom enabled him to know the right place to worship God;<sup>11</sup> more likely it was simply where his friends and servants were, and thus a great place to celebrate God's grace. Whatever the reason, the "celebration marked by sacrifices and a feast prove his sincerity and determination to keep the covenant."<sup>12</sup>

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.

The author of Kings, having told his readers that God gave Solomon wisdom, included four different examples of Solomon's action in order to demonstrate this wisdom. In the first example, Solomon was presented with an unsolvable judicial dispute between two prostitutes. There were no clientele that night, thus there were no witnesses; it was one woman's word against another's.

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.

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<sup>11</sup> Provan, 49.

<sup>12</sup> House, 112.

The key to the resolution is the phrase “because her heart yearned for her son” (vs 26). This verb means “to be very moved emotionally...to feel love and affection very deeply;”<sup>13</sup> Solomon knew that the maternal instinct is very strong, even in prostitutes. This allowed Solomon to devise a test that provided the evidence he needed, and thus resolve the case.

Is the fact that the women were prostitutes significant to the story? It is significant only in the sense that if Solomon was willing to provide justice for a pair of prostitutes, then he would be willing to do it for anyone in the land.<sup>14</sup>

The conclusion of the story is that everyone perceived that Solomon had God’s wisdom, the kind of wisdom necessary to do justice.

4:1 King Solomon was king over all Israel, 2 and these were his high officials: Azariah the son of Zadok was the priest; 3 Elihoreph and Ahijah the sons of Shisha were secretaries; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; 4 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was in command of the army; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; 5 Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers; Zabud the son of Nathan was priest and king’s friend; 6 Ahishar was in charge of the palace; and Adoniram the son of Abda was in charge of the forced labor.

7 Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household. Each man had to make provision for one month in the year. 8 These were their names: Ben-hur, in the hill country of Ephraim; 9 Ben-deker, in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth-shemesh, and Elonbeth-hanan; 10 Ben-hesed, in Arubboth (to him belonged Socoh and all the land of Hopher); 11 Ben-abinadab, in all Naphath-dor (he had Taphath the daughter of Solomon as his wife); 12 Baana the son of Ahilud, in Taanach, Megiddo, and all Beth-shean that is beside Zarethan below Jezreel, and from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah, as far as the other side of Jokmeam; 13 Ben-geber, in Ramoth-gilead (he had the villages of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead, and he had the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, sixty great cities with walls and bronze bars); 14 Ahinadab the son of Iddo, in Mahanaim; 15 Ahimaaz, in Naphtali (he had taken Basemath the daughter of Solomon as his wife); 16 Baana the son of Hushai, in Asher and Bealoth; 17 Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar; 18 Shimei the son of Ela, in Benjamin; 19 Geber the son of Uri, in the land of Gilead, the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and of Og king of Bashan. And there was one governor who was over the land.

20 Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.

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<sup>13</sup> Swanson, DBLH 4023;

<sup>14</sup> DeVries, 61.

The second example of Solomon's wisdom was his ability to administrate the united kingdom of Judah and Israel. The writer of Kings noted two aspects of Solomon's administration. The first aspect (1 Ki 4:1-6) was Solomon's officials, the key leaders in his centralized government. The second aspect (1 Ki 4:7-19) was Solomon's officers, the "district governors responsible for raising the revenue necessary for sustaining the central government."<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that these twelve districts sometimes followed tribal boundaries but generally did not. Solomon organized the kingdom in a new way, different from the way Saul and David did things.

Although much time could be spent figuring out who each of these people are and exactly what/where they are responsible for, that's not necessary to understand the main point of these lists: God had not only given Solomon the wisdom to settle judicial disputes between two people, he had also given him the wisdom "to rule all the territory God promised to Abraham. The land Moses desired, Joshua conquered, and David subdued now lay in the hands of a man of unsurpassed wisdom...The reader is intended to marvel at the complexity of a kingdom requiring such a sophisticated system."<sup>16</sup>

What was the result of Solomon's rule via God's wisdom? Verse 20 informs the reader that Judah and Israel were populous, were well provisioned, and were happy. Solomon was the ideal ruler.

21 Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. 22 Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, 23 ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl. 24 For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him. 25 And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon. 26 Solomon also had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen. 27 And those officers supplied provisions for King Solomon, and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each one in his month. They let nothing be lacking. 28 Barley also and straw for the horses and swift steeds they brought to the place where it was required, each according to his duty.

The third example of Solomon's wisdom was his ability to rule the peoples around the united kingdom, the kingdoms that his father David had conquered. The writer of Kings notes two ways his rule impacted the children of Israel. First, the foreigners helped pay the taxes. Solomon's centralized government took a lot of money to run—as would his building projects; see 1 Ki 5-7—and the tribute from these kingdoms provided some of

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<sup>15</sup> House, 115.

<sup>16</sup> House, 116.

the funding. Second, there was peace and safety. The phrase “under his vine and under his fig tree” is also used in Mi 4:4, a text on the Messiah’s rule over the millennial kingdom, where swords are beaten in plows and no one is frightened. Though it’s unlikely the writer of Kings was suggesting Solomon’s reign was a type of the millennial kingdom, it was at the least an ideal kingdom.

But in the midst of this idealism, the author notes something not so ideal. Solomon had a lot of horses. Dt 17:14-20 described the requirements of a king, and verse 16 says, “He must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses.”<sup>17</sup> Much like 1 Ki 3:1-3 revealed a divided heart in Solomon’s love and worship, 1 Ki 4:26 reveals a divided heart in his possession and his trust, a foreshadowing of what’s to come.

29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, 30 so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. 32 He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. 33 He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. 34 And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

The fourth and final example is a set of general statements regarding the depth and breadth of Solomon’s wisdom. God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding and did so in great abundance, everything from literature to botany to biology. At this point there should be no doubt in the reader’s mind that God has given his wisdom to Solomon and given it in great abundance; God kept his word.

Note the start and end of this paragraph. God gave Solomon wisdom, and the nations came to hear it. In the midst of keeping his covenants, God was bringing glory to himself, not just from Israel, but from all the nations. God’s desire is that the whole world should know him.

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<sup>17</sup> The next verse says, “He shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away,” which is exactly what happened in 1 Ki 11.

## Three Levels of History

1. Personal history – This is a story of a king receiving wisdom from God.
2. National History – This is a story about God providing wisdom to ensure the success of the Davidic dynasty.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about God enabling a king who was attempting to fulfill his plan.

## Jesus and the Gospel

This story reflects mankind's **need for redemption** through Jesus and the gospel.

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? We tend to be half-hearted in our walk with the Lord. We want to obey and please the Lord, but we also tend to do what is expedient, rather than trusting him fully.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God's grace to meet our need? God is gracious to supply what we need to obey him despite our faults and our sin tendencies.

## Outline

This outline is based upon the scenes of the chapters:

1. Solomon needed God's wisdom (1 Ki 3:1-9).
2. Solomon received God's wisdom (1 Ki 3:10-15).
3. Solomon used God's wisdom:
  - a. To solve a judicial dispute (1 Ki 3:16-28).
  - b. To govern Judah and Israel (1 Ki 4:1-20).
  - c. To govern the surrounding kingdom (1 Ki 4:21-28).
  - d. To understand the world (1 Ki 4:29-34).

## Central Truth of the Story

The author of Kings wrote 1 Kings 3-4 in order to demonstrate to exilic Jews that God empowers those who desire to accomplish his plans.

## Teaching Outline

God always accomplishes his plans, and God wants this church to know that he empowers those who want to work with him. In 1 Kings 3-4 we are going to see 3 truths about God's empowerment of his people.

1. God empowers his people when they ask for help (1 Ki 3:1-9).

2. God empowers his people with just the right gifts (1 Ki 3:10-15).
3. God empowers his people for every situation
  - a. Difficult situations (1 Ki 3:16-28).
  - b. Complex situations (1 Ki 4:1-28).
  - c. Ordinary situations (1 Ki 4:29-34).

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