

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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THE WISDOM AND RICHES OF SOLOMON

Reading: 1 Kings 3:1-13

Today's lesson gives us many things to ponder as to how our lives are going, and warnings of dangers which can pull us away from God.

We commence our lesson in the days of Solomon. David had brought a measure of peace to Israel after all the wars he had fought and no Solomon was ruler over that great kingdom with all the promises God had made to David and his family. When we analyse Solomon in the chapter we have in front of us, verse 3 tells us that *he loved God and walked in the ways of David his father*. The in verse 5 he went to Gibeon. Why? Well if you look at 2 Chronicles 1:3 we find that the Tabernacle was at Gibeon because it had not at that time been brought to Jerusalem. Obviously now with David dead and Solomon the sole ruler he must have gone to Gibeon to worship at the Tabernacle and offer himself to God's service. He was about 18 or 20 at this time, and during the night God appeared to him in a dream and asked him what gift he would like at this time for God to give him. I am sure you will remember that Solomon asked for *wisdom*, but for wisdom for a special reason – he wanted an understanding heart to be able to rule and judge God's people and know the difference between good and evil. Solomon obviously realised the great work in from of him and the need of God's help, and God was very pleased with his request and gave him an added bonus promising him: wisdom, honour, riches and a long life.

Which of these did he not receive? Find out and tell me. You will find a big clue to the answer in chapter 3. If God promised him these four things and God never breaks his promise why did he not receive one of the promises?

Coming back to the promise of wisdom I suppose it would be easy to think that Solomon was given this wisdom which we would all like the easy way. If we think this, then we are wrong. God did bless Solomon with an understanding heart but he had to work to obtain the wisdom. How do we know this? In Ecclesiastes 1:13 Solomon who wrote this book said that when he was king in Jerusalem he gave his heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things under heaven. Before we go on we can look to ourselves. If we pray for God to help us to understand our Bibles and our concordances and searching out the beautiful points that are hidden just under the surface. Find the verse in James chapter 1 which promises this wisdom to us. Don't you think that is a point worth thinking about? God will help and bless us in the understanding of his word and in many other ways God will be with us. Do you bother to ask him? ... and then work at it? ... let's all think about this.

The incident which follows in chapter 3 of the two women claiming the same child was a way in which Solomon could show to all the nation that he was a wise and fair king. Think of the simple way he dealt with it- no blood tests, but what did he appeal to? The deep feeling for the real mother for her child that she would rather see him given to another person than have him killed. The action Solomon pretended to carry out in having the child killed brought to the surface the true mother's grief.

The wisdom of Solomon grew and his people loved him and respected his rulership. Moving onto chapter 4 verse 29, we read: God gave wisdom and understanding and largeness of heart. Now wisdom means to *have knowledge of a certain matter*. Understanding is the application of that wisdom. Largeness of heart is the ability to grasp matters. So in our language God gave Solomon the opportunity to get the wisdom and in Proverbs he mentions that his mother and his father taught him wise council. This would be his first foundation, then the Law of Moses demanded that the duty of a new king was to write for themselves a copy of the law in a book. Try to imagine writing out the book of the Law. It would be quite time consuming without the modern machines that we have today but the reason for it was that in writing it out the king might remember it better and always have his own copy to constantly refer to as he ruled the people.

From this time on the greatness of Solomon and his kingdom grew and grew... and we must move on to chapter 10 of Kings to consider the riches and honour of this great king. The chapter is concerning the visit of the Queen of Sheba. The general story you will probably know but let us look a bit deeper. Firstly Sheba itself. Do you know where it is? Apparently it was in South Arabia just inland from Aden and in the ancient times this was the main exporting country for spices. Inscriptions have been discovered recording the names of four "spice kingdoms" and Sheba is one of them. It had vast cities of a million inhabitants. Apparently the kings were also priests and therefore interested in religion. Sheba itself was noted for a huge reservoir which conserved the water of the river for irrigation purposes. Archaeologists have revealed some of the glory of Sheba and have exposed the ruins of architecture of surprising splendour and beauty. The worship of the Moon goddess was well established in the land and a temple built to her honour. It is with this background of wealth and greatness that we see this great Queen coming to visit king Solomon.

Sheba would hear about Solomon and the greatness of his kingdom when the spices of Sheba were exported along what is called the Incense Road through 1250 miles of desert to Israel. Look at the word *heard* in verse 1 of chapter 10, it means "kept hearing". The Queen received continuous reports of the glory of Israel's king, so did she come to Israel to compare its glory with her own or was there something greater? Reading the verse carefully we learn she came to Israel because she kept hearing things concerning the name of his God. For a queen to have made a journey of over 1,000 miles in such conditions of travel in those days she must have been deeply interested or curious concerning the wisdom of Solomon and the greatness of the God he worshipped. Jesus comments about the visit of this great queen in Matt 12:42, saying that the Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold a greater than Solomon is here.

Arriving in Jerusalem she was presented to king Solomon and asked him many questions trying to trap him or catch him out as she did so, but Solomon with wisdom answered all her problems, he explained to all who would hear the wonderful worship of the God of Israel and how everything was done. She was permitted to go about and see the condition of the people and the management of the nation; she saw the glory of the kingdom everywhere, a united and happy nation welded together as one in worship. Notice the comment in 1 Kings 10:5 when we read that after she had seen all the glory and heard the wisdom she said "there was no more spirit in her", in other words as we would say today, "her breath was taken away so that she could not speak".

It is difficult to know what to include in this lesson about the greatness of Solomon because in my study I have found out numerous things which have shown the greatness of Solomon...

He was a great builder. In addition to the glorious temple he refortified in Jerusalem, building store cities, and cities for his chariots and horsemen. All the buildings were adorned with pure gold, even the drinking vessels and plates were of gold, there were royal gardens and parks containing artificial lakes, flower beds and orchards. Archaeologists have uncovered many proofs of the building activities of this great king.

Solomon the merchant. Solomon took advantage of the position of Israel. It lies between Asia and Africa. So he controlled the north-south caravan routes and also built a fleet of ships based at Ezion Geber to carry his refined copper and other wares. The fleet made the trip southward to Ethiopia and India every three years bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.

As we can see, Solomon was a truly great king. Known throughout the then known world for his greatness, for his riches, for his wisdom and understanding, but also the greatness of his God. At this stage Solomon's heart was with his God and he did all things well but as we shall in a later lesson this greatness and his riches turned his heart away from God and he forsook the God who had done so much for him and had given him all he ever had.

What does all this mean to us today? The first lesson is clear. If we want to know more about our Bibles and we ask God to help us, he will give us that wisdom, so that we can put the principles we read into practice in our lives.

The second lesson concerns our health and wealth in this life. We must remember all we have comes from God, He gives us our wealth and our health, not for our own use, but to use in God's service.

If we use God's wisdom and blessings aright, we should show to those around us that we are different because of the greatness of the God we serve, so that they will come to us and ask about the Great God of Israel.

Extra work: Answer these questions asked in the lesson.

- 1. Which of the four things promised to Solomon did he never receive and why?*
- 2. Find the verse in James chapter 1 which promises us wisdom if we ask.*
- 3. What do you think would have impressed you the most about the greatness of Solomon's reign if you had been a visitor with Sheba?*

However wise Solomon was, remember the Lord Jesus Christ is far greater than this king on David's throne, and he will soon return to establish the reign of glory and peace and his wisdom will be known throughout the earth. When we read about the greatness in the times of Solomon it helps us to have a little insight to the kingdom age....