

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

I Kings 3

The things that should especially be remembered about David are that before Samuel anointed him he was a shepherd of Bethlehem, that he was a musician and also a great warrior, and that the book of Psalms was in part written through him.

Doctrinal Points

We have peace only when we love to do right.

Notes for Parents

When anyone says that someone is “a regular Solomon,” we know that he means that the person is unusually wise. Our story today tells us how Solomon came to be so wise. He was a son of David, but not one of his older sons. In fact he was a young man—perhaps not more than twenty—when he came to the throne, and in our chapter he himself says to the Lord, “I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.” But we are also told that “Solomon loved the Lord.” And when the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Ask what I shall give thee,” Solomon did not ask for riches or power or long life, but for an understanding heart, that he might “discern between good and bad” and judge his people wisely. In other words, Solomon’s wisdom was grounded in humility, love to the Lord, and the desire to do right in the Lord’s sight. We read in Psalm 111:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.” No one can be wise who imagines that he knows enough to do right without constantly looking to the Lord for guidance and strength.

And trusting in the Lord and obeying His commandments is the only road to peace. The name *Solomon* [*Shalom*] means “peaceful.” All our conflicts and distresses come from trust in self or in

others instead of in the Lord. The forty years of Solomon's reign were years of peace. The fame of his wisdom spread, and kings and queens came to him for instruction and advice. In accordance with the Lord's promise he also acquired great riches. Chapter 10 especially tells of the glory of his kingdom.

But the crowning work of Solomon's reign was the building of the temple at Jerusalem. David had wanted to build it, but had been told that he must not because he was "a man of war." The temple of the Lord is a picture of a character built according to the Lord's commandments. It is the crowning work of every good life. It is really the work of the Lord in us as we put away our selfish thoughts and desires and make way in our souls for His unselfish love to flow in. Battles with temptation must first be fought—this is pictured by the reign of David—but as the battles are won, peace and happiness follow.

Why did not the glory of Solomon's kingdom continue? The answer to this question forms the background for a later lesson.

Primary

The story of Solomon's dream is a simple one. The children should learn what he asked for and what the Lord promised him. Tell them that to have a wise and understanding heart means to be able to know what the Lord wants us to do and to love to do it, and point out that when we really love someone, we will try to behave in such a way as to make that person happy. This is also an opportunity to review the names of the great leaders of Israel and see what the children remember about each.

What special talents did David have?

What book in the Bible is called "the book of David"?

David was a great warrior and conquered all the enemies of Israel. When the time came for him to die, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to him and told him that his son Solomon—one of his younger sons—was to be king after him. So David, even before he died, had the priests anoint Solomon to be king. One of Solomon's older brothers tried to set himself up as king, but the people accepted Solomon.

The name *Solomon* means “peaceful.”

What did Solomon ask of the Lord?

What did the Lord promise him?

The Lord kept his promise to Solomon, as He always keeps His promises. Solomon became so wise that kings and queens came to ask his advice. And he also became very rich and owned all sorts of beautiful things.

Solomon had peace throughout his reign.

Several chapters in I Kings tell about his wisdom and glory and possessions.

His greatest work was the building of the temple at Jerusalem.

Solomon and David each reigned forty years.

Junior

The Juniors need the lesson of Solomon’s request very much, for they are nearing the age when judgment is likely to be hard rather than wise and loving. Suggest that they learn and use the lines from the last verse of the League Hymn: “Give us to think as angels think, and feel as angels feel.” Go over with them the story in verses 16 to 28 of our chapter, and help them to see that it took an understanding heart to find the truth in the case of the two women. Also have them read the suggested passage in II Chronicles. This is a good opportunity to show them the usefulness of the books of Chronicles and to tell them also that, like the book of Ruth, they do not have an inner sense.

What book of the Bible is sometimes called “the book of David”?

David did not have a peaceful reign, but he was successful against his enemies and brought the kingdom of Israel to its greatest extent and power. He captured Jerusalem and set up his capital there on Mount Zion, one of the two principal hills in the city, and he brought the ark there and put it in a new tabernacle.

The Lord had told David through Nathan the prophet that Solomon, one of his younger sons, was to be his successor. So David, near the end of his life, had Solomon anointed as the next king, and the people accepted him willingly.

The name *Solomon* means “peaceful.” Solomon had peace

throughout his reign, which like David's lasted forty years.

Where did Solomon go early in his reign to make offerings to the Lord?

The old tabernacle which was built at Sinai and which, when we heard of it last, was set up at Shiloh, was now at Gibeon, with all its furnishings except the ark. Read II Chronicles 1:1-6, which gives us some interesting facts. The two books of Chronicles, like the book of Ruth, do not have an inner sense. But since they are part of the ancient Hebrew records, they contain some of the same stories in slightly different form, and we learn from them additional details which the Lord did not choose to make part of the Word.

What did Solomon in his dream ask of the Lord?

What did the Lord promise him?

This request and its fulfillment were the cause of Solomon's greatness. The story of the two mothers in the last part of our chapter gives us an example of the kind of wisdom which comes of an "understanding heart." We are not really wise until we have come to love to do right, and also to understand and sympathize with the good desires of other people.

The Lord had promised David that Solomon should build the temple. David himself had wanted to build it, but the Lord told him he could not because he was a man of war. The building of the temple is a picture of the building of our characters by the Lord as we come into the love of obeying Him. David's battles, like all the battles in the Word, picture our times of temptation, and it is only after we have won the victory over temptation that we really love to obey the Lord.

The temple that Solomon built was not the one of which we read in the Gospels, but it was built on the same site, Mount Moriah, the second hill in Jerusalem. Mount Moriah is thought to be the place where Abraham went intending to sacrifice Isaac. Mount Zion, where David's tabernacle was set up, was a fortified citadel.

The Lord fulfilled His promise to Solomon. Several chapters of I Kings tell of Solomon's riches and beautiful belongings, and of his glory. Kings and queens came from afar to see him and ask him questions.

Intermediate

Review the three kings and their meaning. Point out that the David state supplants the Saul state altogether, while the state represented by Solomon grows naturally out of that represented by David—Solomon was David's son. Touch on the fact that it was Solomon and not David who built the temple.

David was a warrior king. Under him all the enemies of Israel were overcome. And he was allowed to conquer Jerusalem and to establish the ark there in a new tabernacle which he set up on Mount Zion. He wanted to build a temple for the ark, but he was forbidden to do so because he was “a man of war.” The temple is a picture of heavenly character. We have to fight against temptations, but the state of struggle is not the ideal state and is only a preparation for the building of character. The temple of character is built in us by the Lord as we clear the way for His entrance into our hearts.

When Solomon, the son of David, succeeded his father on the throne of Israel, one of his first acts was to offer sacrifices to the Lord at Gibeon. Here the old tabernacle with its furnishings had finally been set up (see II Chronicles 1:1-6). Although the ark was no longer in it, the people still regarded the old tabernacle as their principal place of worship and all the regular ceremonies were maintained there, as they had been at Shiloh in the time of Samuel. In going there Solomon was dedicating himself as best he could to the service of the Lord, and it was there that he had his well-known dream in which the Lord said to him, “Ask what I shall give thee.” Solomon made the wise choice of “an understanding heart” as the most desirable of all gifts which the Lord might grant him. The Hebrew word here translated “understanding” actually means “hearing.” The ear and hearing correspond to obedience.

An understanding heart—or an obedient heart—is the symbol of true wisdom, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, which comes from a genuine desire to do right in the Lord's sight. Swedenborg tells us many times that we can be enlightened by the Lord only when we study the Word from a desire to learn what is true and *do* it. Solomon's wisdom became famous and kings and

queens, like the queen of Sheba, sought his counsel.

Solomon did build the temple. His name means “peaceful.” We have peace only when we love to do right, and the Lord builds a heavenly character in us in proportion as we come into this love. Read I Kings 6:7. The temple is the dwelling place of the Lord in our hearts. This is built silently by the Lord from the materials which we have prepared. Every time we make ourselves remember one of the Lord’s commandments and obey it, we are fashioning a “stone” or a “timber” which the Lord can use in our temple. The temple was seven years in building. We remember the six days of creation and then the sabbath of rest. The whole of our life is needed to complete our temple.

Saul pictures our attempts to do right in our own strength and from our own ideas of what must be right. The kingdom of heaven can never be established in us on this basis. David pictures our attempts to do right according to the truth we find in the Word, trusting in the Lord for guidance and strength. In this way we can recognize and conquer our inner evils and establish the Lord’s rule in our minds as well as in our outward lives. But Solomon pictures the final state of regeneration when we do the Lord’s will from the love of doing it. Then there is peace. All the riches and beautiful possessions of Solomon, which are described in several chapters of I Kings, represent the beautiful things which we have in our souls when Solomon is on the throne.

The wisdom which comes of an understanding heart is illustrated in the story of Solomon’s dealing with the two mothers in the last part of our chapter. Even in the letter we can see that Solomon was given to understand the feeling that would be in the heart of the true mother, who would sacrifice her own claim to the child rather than have it destroyed. But there is a deeper meaning in the story. A son always pictures truth. The pretended mother pictures those who do not really care for the truth, but want to seem to possess it. The true mother represents those who really love the truth and are willing to acknowledge that it is not their own in order to keep it alive. An understanding heart in its inner meaning

is the acknowledgment that all truth and goodness are the Lord's and not our own.

Basic Correspondences

- the ear and hearing = obedience
the temple = true character in which the Lord dwells
Solomon = the rule of divine truth as seen when we have come to love to obey it
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Senior

The Solomon state can be illustrated for the Seniors from their own experience. Let them think of temptations which they had in early childhood and felt very strongly—such as eating things on the sly—and which they have entirely overcome. In respect to such things they already have come to love to do right instead of wrong, and so are at peace. The implications of “an understanding heart” will furnish ample material for discussion.

The three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon, represent stages in our regeneration. Under Saul we keep the commandments from a sense of duty, thinking principally that they will prosper us in the world and get us to heaven. Under David we keep them from an understanding of the Lord's purpose in giving them to us and a desire to correct our inner as well as our outer life. Under Solomon we keep them because we have learned to love to keep them. Then they are written in our hearts and we are no longer in a constant state of struggle against our own selfish desires. The name *Solomon* means “peaceful.” To love to do the Lord's will is peace. And what Solomon asked of the Lord was “an understanding heart.”

There is a difference between knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom. One may have a great deal of knowledge, but if he cannot organize it and apply it to his life, he is not intelligent. And he is not wise until he has proved his knowledge and his intelligence by life experience.

The temple was built by Solomon. The materials, stone and wood, basic symbols of truth and goodness, were brought from outside the Holy Land, and each piece was fashioned before it was

brought. Our temple is built of the truth and goodness we have made our own by applying it in our daily life. We fashion its stones and timbers by our victories in temptation, but we do not actually build the temple in this way. The stones and timbers must be brought to the Lord. Our temple is a heavenly character, and it is built in us by the Lord. It rises up silently within us—read I Kings 6:7—and at the end of seven years (that is, when the Lord sees that we have reached the full measure of the goodness we are willing to achieve), it stands forth in its final form as we pass into the spiritual world.

The oracle or Holy of Holies of the temple was entirely covered with gold leaf, a symbol of the love which should be in our hearts. When all was complete, the ark was brought into it, and then “the glory of the Lord filled the temple” and Solomon had a solemn dedication service. This is a beautiful picture of a life dedicated to the Lord’s service, with the commandments at the center kept willingly from love to the Lord. Such a life is full of the glory of the Lord.

The Lord’s promise to Solomon to add to him the riches and glory for which he had not asked was fully kept. The chapters telling of his marvelous possessions picture in the internal sense the spiritual riches of a truly good life. Every detail has its meaning.

We do not reach the Solomon state in its fullest sense until our life in this world is over, but we do have repeated limited experiences of it as we overcome one temptation after another. When we recognize any given evil in ourselves, fight against it with the Lord’s help, conquer it, and come to love its opposite, we know something of the peace and beauty and spiritual riches which are in store for the faithful, and which are pictured by the glory of Solomon’s kingdom.

The story of the two mothers in the latter part of our chapter is a vivid picture of what is meant by wisdom. We are not wise until we acknowledge from the heart that all truth is from the Lord and not the product of our own intelligence. A son always pictures truth. The two women are different kinds of affection for truth,

the one genuine, the other pretended. The true mother would rather give up her own claim to the truth than have it perverted. The pretended mother would rather destroy the truth than acknowledge it to be anything but her own. At the bottom of all the false teaching in the world today concerning the Lord and the Word can be found the unwillingness to acknowledge that there is any higher authority than man's own intelligence. If you will keep this firmly in mind and analyze the reasons given you in the business and professional world and in college for disbelief in the Lord and the Word, you will be able to stand on your own feet spiritually and be saved from swallowing a great many falsities.

Adult

The meaning of the three kings should be reviewed and the process of the development of wisdom clearly explained. Then discussion should center on the fact that the Lord's request of Solomon in verse 5 is addressed to each one of us also, and on the importance of our choice.

Solomon's accession to the throne of Israel pictures the coming of a new state. There are a number of important general points to note in connection with it. (1) The new king is a son of the preceding one, whereas David was of a different line from Saul. (2) Solomon is anointed by the express command of David, and almost immediately assumes full power. (3) He does not have to conquer any of his kingdom nor to defend it, but instead is freely consulted and assisted by other kings. (4) He is free to build, to adorn his land, and to amass riches.

In AE 654²⁹ Swedenborg says that Solomon represents "the Lord in relation to His celestial kingdom and His spiritual kingdom." That is, Solomon, whose name means "peaceful," enters into the fruits of David's reign. He does not have to undo any of David's work. We have seen that this was not true of David's accession, which was marked by difficulty and delay through conflict with Saul. The change from a natural understanding of truth to a spiritual understanding is slow and difficult. But when the spiritual

understanding is established and has been exercised and strengthened by years of successful conflict with the evils which oppose our regeneration, there comes a time when we pass from conflict to peace, the celestial state in which we do right because we love to do it. David dies, in the sense that we no longer have to obey truth against our will, for we no longer will anything which is contrary to the truth. This peaceful or “celestial” state is represented by Solomon. Love to the Lord and love to the neighbor are so firmly established in our hearts that the Lord can give us a perception of the truth. This is the highest goal of the Christian life, but it is a state to which few of us attain. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

We may wonder why, if Solomon represents this highest state, he was permitted to marry so many wives and to worship other gods as well as Jehovah. We shall see that these very things led to the breaking up of Solomon’s kingdom, and that they represent temptations which assail us even in this highest state and which must be resisted. But the stream of truth which ultimates itself in the letter of the Word, spoken and acted out so often by evil men, has always inmosty a pure meaning relating to the life of the Lord. When we think of Solomon as a representative of the Lord after His coming into the world, his many marriages and his tolerance of the worship of other gods picture the Lord’s love reaching out and seeking to draw to Him the good of all religions and offering salvation to all who seek to live rightly from a religious principle whether they know His true name and character or not.

Solomon asked in his dream, “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad.” This desire involves the very state which Solomon represents, a heart so established in what is good that it has a perception of truth. We should make a distinction between *knowledge*, *intelligence*, and *wisdom*. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts in the memory, facts about spiritual as well as about natural things. Knowledge is the necessary basis for all our thought.

For example, we must know the commandments before we can use them in our lives. Intelligence belongs to the rational faculty and is the power of arranging our knowledges and applying them to the various situations in which Providence places us. Without intelligence we cannot judge our conduct in relation to the commandments. But wisdom is of the heart as well as the mind. When we have learned the commandments and consistently applied them to our conduct, we come to *know* them by experience as the laws of life. In connection with this development, verse 1 of our chapter is particularly interesting when we remember that Pharaoh's daughter would represent the affection for memory knowledges. Read also I Kings 7:8 and 9:24. Millo was one of the ramparts of Jerusalem (cf. II Samuel 5:9).

We are wise when, through experience, the commandments are written on our hearts. For what we truly *are* proceeds out of the heart (Matthew 12:34-35). No matter how much we know or how cleverly we can reason, if we do not love goodness we are not wise, and we cannot attain this wisdom without long practice in keeping the commandments. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mind, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man . . . And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man . . ." (Matthew 7:24-26) The same lesson is strikingly taught in Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said *in his heart*, There is no God." If we have acquired an "understanding heart," we can indeed judge the "Israelites" within ourselves and discern between good and bad. The Lord's reply to Solomon makes us think of His words in Luke 12:31: "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."

In all languages there are fairy stories based upon the granting of wishes. All children are familiar with this idea. Usually these stories are worked out on the basis of an unwise choice and its disastrous results. There is a general truth underlying all such stories—one wonders if all could perhaps be traced to something in the Ancient Word—and as a rule they lead children to think, however superficially, of what would be a really wise wish. Actually

the Lord says to each one of us in our early youth, when we are looking forward to life, “Ask what I shall give thee.” And He also says to us, “Ask, and it shall be given thee; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” We are free to choose our own goal and to work for it, free to mold our lives to the attainment of one objective or another. But the Lord does better for us than the fairies in the story: He tells us beforehand what the wise wish is, and warns us of the disastrous results of foolish wishes. He tells us that life in this world is very brief and that we have eternity before us, and also that we must make our choice here. He tells us that if we choose to wish and struggle for the things of this world, we may indeed attain them, but when our short life here is over, we shall face eternal poverty. But if we choose to wish and to work for eternal goods, we shall have them without fail, whatever our external lot in this world may be.

And the Lord also tells us that the eternal goods may be ours now as well as in the other life. To the man who planned to build ever-larger barns and to take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry, the Lord said: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” But to His disciples He said: “There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.” The Lord’s promises do not fail. If we make Solomon’s choice when the Lord first puts the question to us, and are faithful to that choice (“if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments”), Solomon’s peaceful and glorious kingdom will surely be ours.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 1555: “Few, if any, know how man is brought to true wisdom. Intelligence is not wisdom, but leads to wisdom; for to understand what is true and good is not to be true and good, but to be wise is to be so.

Wisdom is predicated only of the life—that man is such. A man is introduced to wisdom or to life by means of knowing, that is, by means of knowledges. In every man there are two parts, the will and the understanding; the will is the primary part, the understanding is the secondary one. Man's life after death is according to his will part, not according to his intellectual part. The will is being formed in man by the Lord from infancy to childhood, which is effected by means of the innocence that is insinuated, and by means of charity toward parents, nurses, and little children of a like age; and by means of many other things that man knows nothing of, and which are celestial. Unless these celestial things were first insinuated into a man while an infant and a child, he could by no means become a man. *Thus is formed the first plane.* But as a man is not a man unless he is endowed also with understanding, will alone does not make the man, but understanding together with will; and understanding cannot be acquired except by means of knowledges; and therefore he must, from his childhood, be gradually imbued with these. *Thus is formed the second plane.* When the intellectual part has been instructed in knowledges, especially in the knowledges of truth and good, then first can the man be regenerated; and, when he is being regenerated, truths and goods are implanted by the Lord by means of knowledges in the celestial things with which he has been endowed by the Lord from infancy, so that his intellectual things make a one with his celestial things; and when the Lord has thus conjoined these, the man is endowed with charity, from which he begins to act, this charity being of conscience. In this way he for the first time receives new life, and this by degrees. The light of this life is called wisdom, which then takes the first place, and is set over the intelligence. *Thus is formed the third plane.* When a man has become like this during his bodily life, he is then in the other life being continually perfected. These considerations show what is the light of intelligence, and what is the light of wisdom.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. How was David different from Saul? *obeyed direct orders of the Lord*
P. What special talents did David have? *musician, poet*
J. What book in the Bible was given in part through David? *Psalms*
J. What was accomplished in David's reign? *peace*
J. Where did David set up the ark? *Jerusalem*
P. Who was the third king of Israel? *Solomon*
P. Whose son was he? *David and Bathsheba*
J. What does his name mean? *peaceful*
J. Where did Solomon go to worship the Lord? *Gibeon*

- J. What was at Gibeon? *tabernacle*
- P. Who spoke to Solomon at Gibeon in a dream? *the Lord*
- P. What did the Lord ask Solomon to do? *“Ask what I shall give you”*
- P. What did Solomon ask the Lord to give him? *an understanding heart*
- J. What did the Lord tell him? *he would have it, plus riches and honor*
- J. What did Solomon build at Jerusalem? *temple*
- P. How long did Solomon reign? *forty years*
- I. What is represented by Solomon? *loving to live the Lord’s will*
- S. Why did Solomon and not David built the temple? *heavenly character comes only when one is at peace with God*