



## **Holy Beginnings: God's Wisdom for God's Work (1 Kings 3)**

*Notes: Week One*

### **1 Kings 3 (HCSB)**

#### **The Lord Appears to Solomon**

<sup>3</sup> Solomon made an alliance<sup>[a]</sup> with Pharaoh king of Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. Solomon brought her to live in the city of David until he finished building his palace, the Lord's temple, and the wall surrounding Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> However, the people were sacrificing on the high places, because until that time a temple for the Lord's name had not been built. <sup>3</sup> Solomon loved the Lord by walking in the statutes of his father David, but he also sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

<sup>4</sup> The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there because it was the most famous high place. He offered 1,000 burnt offerings on that altar. <sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask. What should I give you?"

<sup>6</sup> And Solomon replied, "You have shown great and faithful love to Your servant, my father David, because he walked before You in faithfulness, righteousness, and<sup>[b]</sup> integrity. You have continued this great and faithful love for him by giving him a son to sit on his throne, as it is today.

<sup>7</sup> "Lord my God, You have now made Your servant king in my father David's place. Yet I am just a youth with no experience in leadership.<sup>[c]</sup><sup>8</sup> Your servant is among Your people You have chosen, a<sup>[d]</sup> people too numerous to be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> So give Your servant an obedient heart to judge Your people and to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

<sup>10</sup> Now it pleased the Lord that Solomon had requested this. <sup>11</sup> So God said to him, "Because you have requested this and did not ask for long life<sup>[e]</sup> or riches for yourself, or the death<sup>[f]</sup> of your enemies, but you asked discernment for yourself to understand justice, <sup>12</sup> I will therefore do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has never been anyone like you before and never will be again. <sup>13</sup> In addition, I will give you what you did not ask for: both riches and honor, so that no man in any kingdom will be your equal during your entire life. <sup>14</sup> If you walk in My ways and keep My statutes and commands just as your father David did, I will give you a long life."

<sup>15</sup> Then Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream. He went to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant, and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he held a feast for all his servants.

## Solomon's Wisdom

<sup>16</sup> Then two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. <sup>17</sup> One woman said, "Please my lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was in the house. <sup>18</sup> On the third day after I gave birth, she also had a baby and we were alone. No one else <sup>[g]</sup> was with us in the house; just the two of us were there. <sup>19</sup> During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. <sup>20</sup> She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while your servant was asleep. She laid him at her breast, and she put her dead son in my arms. <sup>21</sup> When I got up in the morning to nurse my son, I discovered he was dead. That morning, when I looked closely at him I realized that he was not the son I gave birth to."

<sup>22</sup> "No," the other woman said. "My son is the living one; your son is the dead one."

The first woman said, "No, your son is the dead one; my son is the living one." So they argued before the king.

<sup>23</sup> The king replied, "This woman says, 'This is my son who is alive, and your son is dead,' but that woman says, 'No, your son is dead, and my son is alive.'" <sup>24</sup> The king continued, "Bring me a sword." So they brought the sword to the king. <sup>25</sup> Solomon said, "Cut the living boy in two and give half to one and half to the other."

<sup>26</sup> The woman whose son was alive spoke to the king because she felt great compassion <sup>[h]</sup> for her son. "My lord, give her the living baby," she said, "but please don't have him killed!"

But the other one said, "He will not be mine or yours. Cut him in two!"

<sup>27</sup> The king responded, "Give the living baby to the first woman, and don't kill him. She is his mother." <sup>28</sup> All Israel heard about the judgment the king had given, and they stood in awe of the king because they saw that God's wisdom was in him to carry out justice.

### Footnotes:

- a. [1 Kings 3:1](#) Lit *Solomon made himself a son-in-law*
- b. [1 Kings 3:6](#) Lit *and with You*
- c. [1 Kings 3:7](#) Lit *am a little youth and do not know to go out or come in*
- d. [1 Kings 3:8](#) Lit *chosen many*
- e. [1 Kings 3:11](#) Lit *for many days*
- f. [1 Kings 3:11](#) Lit *life*
- g. [1 Kings 3:18](#) Lit *No stranger*
- h. [1 Kings 3:26](#) Lit *because her compassion grew hot*

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Kings 3

**3:1** Recalling Egypt's glorious past, some assume that Solomon was the junior member of this marriage alliance. Two points counter that interpretation. (1) The Egyptians did not typically send princesses even to other great kingdoms. And it was probably quite unlikely for Egypt to send a princess to an inferior ally. (2) The fact that Pharaoh Siamun captured and burned Gezer, perhaps earlier during David's reign, but then gave it back to Solomon (see note at [9:16](#)) speaks of Solomon's strength rather than his weakness. Pharaoh means "big house" and was a title, not a proper name, just as "the White House" serves as a popular title for the president of the United States. For such a prestigious wife, the cramped quarters of the original city of David were not suitable.

Some suggest that brides in political marriages, such as the one between Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter, conducted the business that in modern times is conducted by ambassadors. Therefore Solomon's granting his foreign wives and the representatives of their governments the right to worship their own gods while in Israel was, on the human level, a diplomatic courtesy. But the Lord regarded such courtesy toward false gods as apostasy. This was Solomon's first recorded example of conflict between prudent politics and faithfulness to Yahweh.

**3:2-3a** Archaeology shows that religious syncretism was always a part of popular Hebrew culture. The archaeological evidences for religious syncretism are as abundant for Judah as they are for Israel. The worship at the high places, or hilltop altars, might have been of three sorts: (1) the legal local worship of Yahweh before any formal recognition of a national shrine; (2) the illegal worship of Yahweh at such shrines after the recognition of a national shrine; and (3) the syncretistic worship of local Baals at local shrines. Not all scholars agree that the local worship of Yahweh was illegal *before* the temple was built. Further, it is not certain that God absolutely prohibited worship of Himself at the historic pagan holy sites. The two rules were (1) that the pagan equipment should be destroyed ([Dt 7:5](#)) and (2) that the site should be explicitly chosen or accepted by God ([Dt 12:5](#); [1Ki 18:20-38](#)), usually by an epiphany or an oracle.

Debate about the meaning of "high places" aside, the normal locations for shrines for sky gods, such as Baal and Yahweh, were on the hilltops. These were closer to the sky, and were often situated over a cave that according to ancient lore could represent the underworld. The cave under the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem today may have been the cave under the site of Solomon's temple. It is not certain that Solomon personally offered sacrifices.

**3:3b-4** Even if a pious Solomon did sacrifice at the high places for Yahweh before the temple was built, it might have been proper worship because of Solomon's better attitude. Part of King Saul's offense ([1Sam 13:9-13](#)) was a disobedient attitude. After the temple was built, worshiping the Lord at the high places was sin. The numbers of the sacrifices may indicate that Solomon authorized the offering of abundant sacrifices by other, appropriate personnel.

**3:5** Gibeon was the last of the pre-temple national shrines. It was located about six miles north of Jerusalem. How did it become a sacred city since it passed into Hebrew control by deception ([Jos 9](#))? Holy places tended to remain holy through changes in time and local population. The Hebrews acknowledged its holy status when the tabernacle and the bronze altar were put there.

---

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Kings 3".

**3:6** Faithful love (Hb *chesed*) almost always refers to covenant faithfulness. David was faithful in his obedience to God; God was, in turn, faithful in giving and keeping His covenant promises to David. Covenant faithfulness is a key concept in OT theology.

**3:9-11** Solomon's prayer marked a major cultural shift in Hebrew life, a shift to peaceful values involving wisdom and skill rather than military craft. Solomon reflected these new values in asking for a heart that would be obedient (to the covenant) in judging the nation. Solomon's request was a request to discern. That a ruler of a great empire would desire an obedient, wise heart signaled a major change in values. These new values are also reflected in the royal psalm, [Psalm 72](#). The old values are reflected in the title "man of war" ([1Ch 28:3](#)), assigned to David. In the old ways, prowess in war made a political leader mighty.

**3:12-13** Solomon thus got the best of both sets of values, the wisdom that marked the wise man or effective businessman, as well as the riches... honor, and power that marked success in the older values.

**3:15** Solomon celebrated this oracle with a great sacrificial feast of fellowship offerings for his servants—perhaps for all the resident palace staff.

**3:16** Though Solomon's reign involved a new, distant, imperial king, the people, at least those in Jerusalem, still had access to royal justice. The lack of such access during David's reign was used by Absalom to win the hearts of the people ([2Sam 15:3-6](#)).

**3:16-27** Then marks the connection to the previous dream that Solomon had. He had asked for the ability to discern so he could judge God's people ([v. 9](#)). God answered his prayer ([Jms 1:5](#)) and gave more than he asked for. This passage is an example of the use of a God-given discerning mind. Ancient Mesopotamian kings kept records of exceptional legal decisions, which were presented to their gods to show that they had acted wisely (cp. D. J. Wiseman, *TOTC*, p. 87). Israel's historians evidently kept similar records.

## The Apologetics Study Bible<sup>2</sup>

### 1 Kings 3

**3:1** "Made an alliance" is literally "to become a son-in-law," used in a political context. Marriage to foreigners was explicitly forbidden by the law ([Dt 7:3-4](#)). Her ultimate permanent residence was built outside Jerusalem, but Solomon had higher construction priorities at the moment.

**3:2** "High places," the traditional place for sacrifice among the Canaanites, were not limited to the heights, but these open-air sanctuaries were also found in towns and villages. Another translation might be "country shrines."

**3:3** The toleration of these places by the kings of Israel is a major and recurring complaint of the author.

**3:4** Compare this verse with [2 Ch 1:2-6](#). Here the author gave only a brief mention of the worship experience at Gibeon and then moved directly on to Solomon's dream. The book of 2 Ch describes Solomon's worship in more detail. This shows a difference in purpose. Second Chronicles focuses on fidelity to the worship of the Lord, whereas this book focuses on Solomon's character.

**3:7** "A youth" was an exaggeration. Solomon meant he was inexperienced.

**3:11** Jesus enunciated a similar principle in [Mt 6:33](#): "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."

**3:16** [Second Ch 1](#) omits [3:16-28](#), the story of Solomon's wisdom in solving the case of the identity of a baby. While the writer of 1 Kg used secular *events* to illustrate Solomon's greatness, the writer of the books of Ch used the building and furnishing of the *temple* to define Solomon's greatness. These two visions of Solomon's greatness are not incompatible or contradictory, but they emphasize different aspects of the king. The author intended to contrast Solomon's wisdom at the beginning of his reign with his fall from wisdom during his latter years.

**3:18** The mother's point was that there were no other possible suspects to the murder.

---

2. Ted Cabal, ed., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understanding Why You Believe*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 501-502.

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

### 1 Kings 3

**3:1** Marriage between royal families was a common practice in the ancient Near East because it secured peace. Although Solomon's marital alliances built friendships with surrounding nations, they were also the beginning of his downfall. These relationships became inroads for pagan ideas and practices. Solomon's foreign wives brought their gods to Jerusalem and eventually lured him into idolatry ([11:1-6](#)).

It is easy to minimize religious differences in order to encourage the development of a friendship. What can seem small in a friendship, however, will have an enormous impact upon a marriage. When you're young and in love, you may be idealistic, minimizing religious differences as something you can "work out." The reality is, however, that God gives us standards to follow for all our relationships, including marriage, for our own good. If we follow God's will, we will not be lured away from our true focus.

**3:2, 3** God's laws said that the Israelites could make sacrifices only in specified places ([Deuteronomy 12:13, 14](#)). This was to prevent the people from instituting their own methods of worship and allowing pagan practices to creep into their worship. But many Israelites, including Solomon, made sacrifices in the surrounding hills. Solomon loved God, but this act was sin. It took the offerings out of the watchful care of priests and ministers loyal to God and opened the way for false teaching to be tied to these sacrifices. God appeared to Solomon to grant him wisdom, not during the sacrifice, but at night. God honored his prayer but did not condone the sacrifice.

**3:6-9** When given a chance to have anything in the world, Solomon asked for wisdom—"an understanding heart"—in order to lead well and to make right decisions. We can ask God for this same wisdom ([James 1:5](#)). Notice that Solomon asked for understanding to carry out his job; he did not ask God to do the job for him. We should not ask God to do *for* us what he wants to do *through* us. Instead, we should ask God to give us the wisdom to know what to do and the courage to follow through on it.

**3:11-14** Solomon asked for wisdom, not wealth, but God gave him riches and long life as well. While God does not promise riches to those who follow him, he gives us what we need if we put his kingdom, his interests, and his principles first ([Matthew 6:31-33](#)). Setting your sights on riches will only leave you dissatisfied because even if you get the riches you crave, you will still want something more. But if you put God and his work first, he will satisfy your deepest needs.

**3:12** Solomon received "a wise and understanding heart" from God, but it was up to Solomon to apply that wisdom to all areas of his life. Solomon was obviously wise in governing the nation, but he was foolish in running his household. Wisdom is both the ability to discern what is best and the strength of character to act upon that knowledge. While Solomon remained wise all his life, he did not always act upon his wisdom ([11:6](#)).

**3:16-28** Solomon's settlement of this dispute was a classic example of his wisdom. This wise ruling was verification that God had answered Solomon's prayer and given him an understanding heart. We have God's wisdom available to us as we pray and request it. But, like Solomon, we must put it into action. Applying wisdom to life demonstrates our understanding.

---

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 517.

## Life Essentials Study Bible<sup>4</sup>

### A Principle to Live By 1 Kings #4: Subtle Idolatry

*from 1 Kings 3:1-3*

**Even when we have a strong desire to walk in God's will,  
we must still be careful not to allow any form of idolatry to creep into our lives.**

Initially, Solomon wanted to obey God in every respect. However, by worshiping the one true God in the high places, the same way the Canaanites worshiped their false gods, it opened the door for Satan to eventually lead him and his subjects into blatant idolatry.

Solomon's eventual demise was hastened when he violated another commandment of God and multiplied foreign wives and concubines who were devoted to these false gods. When he grew older, these "wives seduced him to follow other gods," and he built high places for these women and even participated in their detestable idolatry ([11:4](#); see also [vv. 5-10](#)).

Part of Satan's deceptive strategy is to use what appears to be innocent distractions to lead Christians into sinful practices. Anything that becomes more important than God Himself is indeed an idolatrous activity. That is why the apostle John concluded his first letter with these penetrating words: "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" ([1Jn 5:21](#)).

#### **Reflection and Response**

*What are some of the things in our own culture that are not wrong in themselves  
but that can begin to take the place of God in our lives?*

---

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 432-434.

## A Principle to Live By 1 Kings #5: Unselfish Motives

from 1 Kings 3:4-15

**To be assured of eternal rewards, we should demonstrate true humility and concern for others.**

Because Solomon did not pray selfishly, God not only gave him incredible and incomparable wisdom but blessed him with unequalled “riches and honor” (v. 13). The author of 1 Kings has recorded numerous events to demonstrate God’s faithfulness to these promises (see [3:28](#); [4:21,29,32-34](#); [8:10](#); [10:4-5,23](#)).

Unfortunately, there are some who teach that God has promised honor, glory, and material riches to all Christians today if we demonstrate the same humble spirit as Solomon. There is no question that God promised to bless the earthly lives of the children of Israel if they were faithful to Him. However, these specific promises are never repeated in the same way under the new covenant. Rather, God has promised to meet our needs by providing grace to endure under all circumstances. This is what enabled the Macedonian churches to give materially when they had virtually nothing to give:

*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God granted to the churches of Macedonia: During a severe testing by affliction, their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed into the wealth of their generosity. . . . and not just as we had hoped. Instead, they gave themselves especially to the Lord, then to us by God’s will. ([2Co 8:1-2,5](#))*

The focus in the New Testament is clearly on eternal rewards, not earthly rewards. This does not mean God will not bless us—even materially. However, our motivation should always be based on our love for God and one another, not material prosperity for ourselves.

### **Reflection and Response**

*What are the dangers inherent in taking promises God made to Israel under the old covenant and applying them to believers today?*