

# The wisdom of Solomon

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Solomon was the third King of Israel, following on after King Saul and King David. He is credited with being the wisest of all people, but in his later life fell from grace. Solomon wrote 'The Song of Solomon', 'Ecclesiastes', and much of the Book of Proverbs. His major achievement was the building of the first Temple in Jerusalem.

Solomon's life is described in the first 12 chapters of 1 Kings, and in the first 9 chapters of 2 Chronicles.

- Name** Solomon comes from the Hebrew name שְׁלֹמֹה (*Shelomoh*) which was derived from the Hebrew שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*) meaning "peace". Solomon's life was not characterised by peace!
- Birth** Solomon was born in Jerusalem c.1010BC. He was the second child of King David and his wife Bathsheba, widow of Uriah the Hittite. The first child, a son, had died as God's punishment of David because he had ordered the death of Uriah. Solomon had three full brothers through Bathsheba (Nathan, Shammua, and Shobab), plus other half-brothers through different mothers. 1 Chronicles 3:1-5.
- Date** Solomon's father David reigned over Israel between c. 1010-970 BC. Solomon reigned between c. 970 to 930BC. He died at around 80 years of age and was succeeded by his son Rehoboam. The ten northern tribes refused to accept Rehoboam as king, and formed the northern Kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. Rehoboam continued to reign over the much smaller southern Kingdom of Judah. Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722BC, and Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586BC.

## Outline of Solomon's life from 1 Kings Chapters 1-12.

### The death of David. 1:1 – 2:12

Solomon's reign began with deception and intrigue! With David's three eldest sons dead Adonijah was the logical heir to the throne and he was strongly supported by Ahab, the commander of the army. The prophet Nathan and David's wife Bathsheba tricked David into choosing Solomon as his successor. David charged Solomon to *be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in His ways, and keep His decrees and commandments, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you go.* King David died after a reign of 40 years and he was buried in the City of David.

### Solomon's throne established. 2:13 – 4:34

Solomon's rule was *firmly established* by:

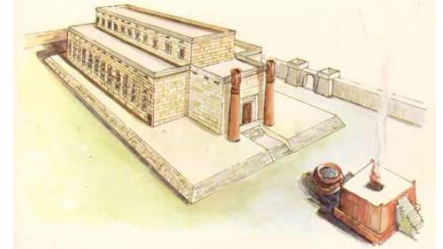
- eliminating his enemies Adonijah, Ahab and Shimei.
- making an alliance with Egypt by marrying the daughter of the Pharaoh.
- asking God for wisdom so he could govern God's people well. This request pleased the Lord so He gave Solomon a *wise and discerning heart* and much *riches and honour*. Solomon's *wisdom from God* was demonstrated immediately when two women said they were the mother of the same child. Solomon resolved the dispute by commanding the child to be cut in half. The true mother said she would rather give up the child than see it killed. Solomon then gave the child to the true mother.
- appointing officials and governors throughout the land.

- ensuring that *nothing was lacking* for his people in Israel (to the north) and Judah (to the south) while himself enjoying great prosperity.

*God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore so that his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. Solomon also spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.*

### **The building of Solomon's temple. 5:1 – 9:9**

Solomon built the temple in fulfillment of God's promise to his father David. (5:3-5). He got timber from Hiram, king of Tyre (5:7-12); labourers from Israel, and used many thousands of craftsmen for the construction. (5:13-18). The temple was built in accordance with God's specifications and took seven years to build. (6:1-38). Solomon also built a palace, which took another thirteen years to build. (7:1-12). The temple was furnished with materials made by the skilled craftsman Hiram (7:1-51) and then the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the inner sanctuary - the Most Holy Place, and *the glory of the Lord filled the temple.*(8:1-11). Solomon prayed a prayer of dedication (8:12-61) and reminded the people that they were to *remain fully committed to the Lord* and *to live by His decrees and obey His commands*. The temple was then dedicated to the Lord and all the people rejoiced because of the good things the Lord had done. (8:62-66). God then reminded Solomon to keep His commandments as David had done and *walk in integrity and uprightness.* (9:1-9).



### **Activities during Solomon's reign. 9:10 – 11:43.**

These chapters record some of the main activities that took place during Solomon's reign:

- Hiram wasn't too pleased with the reward Solomon gave him for his help in building the temple.
- Solomon chose not to make slaves of the Israelites used in building the temple but gave them jobs in his organization. People from other nations were used as slaves.
- Solomon used the temple to sacrifice to the Lord three times each year.
- Solomon greatly expanded Israel's military strength, especially the cavalry and chariots. He founded numerous colonies, some of which doubled as trading posts and military outposts. Trading in luxury products, and importing gold, silver, musical instruments, sandalwood, pearls, ivory, apes and peacocks, he became the most wealthy of the Israelite kings named in the Bible. He built ships specially for this trade. Hiram's men served alongside Solomon's men in these ships. Solomon was *greater in riches and wisdom than all of the other kings of the earth.*
- The Queen of Sheba *heard about the fame of Solomon* and visited him with many questions. She was overwhelmed by his wealth, and by the ease with which he answered all of the questions. She praised God that He had placed Solomon on the throne and made him king. She gave Solomon many gifts including exotic spices.
- Solomon's wisdom didn't keep him from being seduced away from the Lord, especially by his love for *foreign women*. He had *seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray* so that he followed pagan gods and was *not fully devoted to the Lord as the heart of David his father had been*. God became angry with Solomon for his failure to obey the Lord's commands and determined to take away the northern tribes from his rule.
- *The Lord raised up against Solomon* adversaries in Hadad, Eliada, Rezon and Jeroboam.
- Jeroboam was one of Solomon's officials and *a man of standing*. Ahijah the prophet told him that the Lord was going to *tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand* and give him ten tribes. God would bless Jeroboam if He kept God's statutes and commandments and would build an enduring dynasty through him. *Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam but he fled to Egypt and stayed there until Solomon's death.*
- *Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years.*
- When Solomon died *Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king.*

## Division into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. 12:1-33.

- The united kingdom fell apart after the death of Solomon. Jeroboam was the first king of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). It lasted for about 200 years and was ruled from Samaria by 20 kings from nine different dynasties. These kings consistently rejected the Lord and did evil in His sight.
- Rehoboam was the first king of the Southern Kingdom (Judah). It lasted about 350 years and was ruled from Jerusalem by 19 kings, all descendants of King David, except for a brief reign by Athaliah. Many of these kings did evil in the sight of the Lord but a few brought the people back to the Lord (especially Hezekiah and Josiah).
- There was much ill feeling and occasional warfare between tribes in the two kingdoms. This started even in David's time and the division of tribes in the northern and southern kingdoms was pretty predictable.
- The immediate cause of the split into two kingdoms was the unwise way that Rehoboam dealt with representatives of the northern tribes while negotiating for the kingship. Jeroboam, a hero of an earlier rebellion against Solomon was appointed king of the northern tribes and immediately erected shrines at Bethel and Dan with golden calves as gods. These pagan altars later became a symbol of how far the people had fallen away from the Lord.
- There was ongoing warfare between Israel and Judah, particularly over land from the tribe of Benjamin that was claimed by both sides. There were also sporadic invasions from the Arameans in the north and the Egyptians in the south.



Solomon's reign was characterised by great highs and lows. He had great wisdom and enormous wealth but this didn't prevent him turning away from the Lord and suffering God's judgment. We can all learn much from Solomon's wisdom (as in the Book of Proverbs) but also from his downfall. Obedience to the Lord and a strong commitment to maintaining God's standards of righteousness will stand us in good stead as we seek to live out our Christian lives. Solomon expounded these things in many of his proverbs, but in the end didn't live by them – and suffered the consequences.

*Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Proverbs 16:18.*

*Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people. Proverbs 14:34.*

### The wisdom of Solomon

We can learn a lot from Solomon's life, and from his writings, especially as God gave him *wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore* so that his *fame spread to all the surrounding nations.* 1 Kings 4:29. Solomon's wisdom is encapsulated for us in his writings: 'The Song of Solomon', 'Ecclesiastes', and much of the Book of Proverbs. As we explore these writings it is important to recognise that they are examples of a type of literature common in Solomon's day – namely "Wisdom Literature". Wisdom literature uses stories and writings to teach about God and provide wisdom for life. Job and the Psalms are other Old Testament books classified as wisdom literature.

When reading wisdom literature we must recognize that it was written by wise men more than 3000 years ago. As such, it represents the wisdom and understanding of its writers, and the prevailing culture of the time. It should not necessarily be seen as the words of God!



For example:

*Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths of your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or to the left; keep your foot from evil.* Proverbs 4:25-27.

This section of Proverbs contains a direct command to look straight ahead and never turn to the left or right. If we took this literally we wouldn't have much of a life! Most Christians want to be obedient to commands in the Bible but when we come to wisdom literature we soon find that many of the commands are irrelevant or impractical. That's because they are not designed to be taken literally. Wisdom literature contains broad generalisations about life as it was long ago, so we can't take isolated verses from books like Proverbs and say "This is the Word of God". What we can do, though, is glean from them much wisdom that is still relevant today. Solomon himself explained this when he said that his writings were written to help readers *attain wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, and knowledge and discretion to the young.* Proverbs 1:1:2-4.

Solomon teaches us that knowledge of God and the fear of the Lord lead to wisdom that will help us in our everyday life. This will have great benefits in our personal lives, our families, our jobs and our communities. God's blessings come on those who love Him and walk in His ways, but this doesn't mean that life will always be wonderful. The 'wicked' and the 'righteous' both experience their share of life's tribulations, but God's ways are always the best ways for us to live.

### **Wisdom**

In the dictionary wisdom is defined as *the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense and insight*. This is always based on the body of knowledge or experience that has developed within a given society or time period. Solomon gives a whole new perspective on wisdom because he consistently relates it back to the Lord as the source of all wisdom.

Blessed is  
the one who finds  
**WISDOM**  
Proverbs 3:13

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* Proverbs 1:7.

*The Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.* Proverbs 2:6.

*Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding.* Proverbs 4:7.

The Hebrew word Solomon uses here for "wisdom" is חכמה (*chokmah*). It occurs 37 times throughout Proverbs and describes a special ability from God to make choices and use knowledge. Solomon shows us that the starting point for true wisdom is God: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.* Wisdom always has an unchanging reference point: God Himself.

In some of the Book of Proverbs Solomon even goes so far as to personalise wisdom. (See especially Proverbs Chapters 8 and 9). 'Wisdom' speaks to us. 'Wisdom' directs us. We are to listen to wisdom and change our ways. The wisdom here is not human wisdom or a king's wisdom, and definitely not Solomon's wisdom. It is deeper than that. It is wisdom that is part of God Himself who is wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16.

To understand this we need to understand more of the nature of God.

### **God's wisdom**

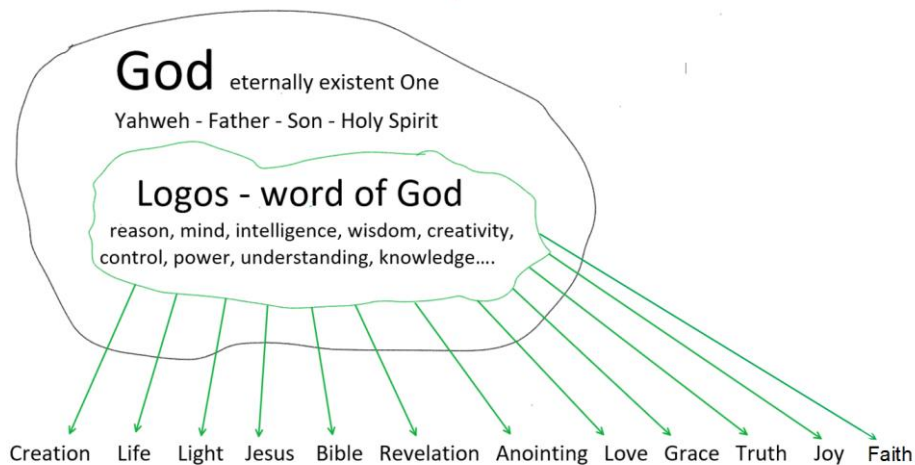
John's gospel tells us that *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. .... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1:1-4, 14.



The Greek word for “Word” used here is *logos*. This word had much greater meaning back in New Testament times, than the way we use ‘word’ today. To the Greek the Word of God meant “*the reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling mind and wisdom of God*”. The *logos* was behind everything that happened. Why is there night/day? How were we made? Why do things happen as they do? How can we know right from wrong? Easy! The *logos* of God. The *logos* pervades all things; makes sense of the world, and keeps everything in its proper order.

To the Jew a word wasn’t just a sound. It had an independent existence, was powerful and did things. Blessings were conferred by words. Wisdom was often personified, and names and their meanings were very important. By His Word God created the world. God spoke and things happened. By His Word God gave life and light. God was His Word and the Word was God. (So much so that the writers of the Targums - translations of the scriptures into Aramaic so the common people could understand - tried to depersonalise the Word, separating it from God’s Person!).

Both Jew and Greek recognised that it was the Word of God that made everything, sustains everything and makes sense of life.



When we use human words to explain or describe God we find they are very limiting. No human words can ever convey the bigness, greatness, power, majesty, creativity or wisdom of God. We know that God is the “eternally existent One”, and we use the words *Yahweh* (Exodus 3:14,15) or *I am* (John 8:58) to recognise this. We also use titles like Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an attempt to describe the ways that the personality of God is expressed towards us. We know that God is a spiritual being that we can relate to in Christ but we also recognise that our understanding of His nature is very limited.

John tells us that the *logos* of God is an essential part of His nature. The Word of God (*logos*) is the way by which He communicates into His created world, and to His people. An essential part of this is His wisdom, but God’s *logos* is also behind:

- **Creation.** John 1:3. Psalm 33:6. By His Word God spoke the world into existence.
- **Life.** Proverbs 4:22; John 6:63. Genesis 1. God breathed into His creation giving life to plants, animals and people. Whenever the Word of God is received it still brings spiritual life. Matthew 4:4.
- **Light.** Psalm 119:105, 130. God’s Word gives light and direction.
- **Jesus.** John 1:14. Hebrews 1:3. 1 John 1:1-3. Hebrews 1:1-3. Jesus is the incarnation of the Word of God. The Word became flesh in Him.
- **Bible.** Hebrews 4:12. 2 Timothy 3:16,17. The Bible was inspired by God and is the main way by which we can get insight into God’s Word.
- **Revelation.** 1 Corinthians 2:1-16. Matthew 21:21. Romans 10:17. In Greek the spoken or revealed Word of God is *rhema*. This is the main way by which the Holy Spirit communicates to us today

(often by revelation from parts of the Bible, or by giving gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially prophecy, word of knowledge and word of wisdom). 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

- **Anointing.** 1 John 2:20. When we receive the Word of God as a revelation it typically comes with an anointing, so we know what it means, or what to do with it.
- **Love.** 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. 1 John 4:7,8. Love is an expression of the heart of God.
- **Grace.** John 1:14. Ephesians 2:8,9. Ephesians 4:7. 2 Corinthians 3:18. John 1:16,17. 2 Corinthians 12:9. Whenever we receive God's Word it comes by God's grace. We deserve God's judgment for our sin, but instead He chooses to bless us because He loves us.
- **Truth.** Psalm 33:4. Psalm 18:30. Isaiah 40:8. Psalm 119:160. James 1:18. John 8:31,32. John 17:8. 2 Timothy 2:15. God's Word is truth. Whenever the Word of God is received it brings truth.
- **Joy.** Jeremiah 15:16. Nehemiah 8:12 Luke 24:32. John 15:11. John 17:13. When God's Word is received it brings joy.
- **Faith.** Romans 10:17. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

So when Solomon personified the word "wisdom" he was actually describing a central aspect of the very nature of God. From the *logos* of God we gain God's wisdom and it comes to us with all of God's creativity, life and power. We can get this wisdom from the Bible, or by revelation from the Holy Spirit or in other more natural ways – eg. through the experiences of life, or from peoples' thoughts or writings. When we receive the wisdom of God it will always give light and life and will be focused on truth. No wonder Solomon says *Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding.* Proverbs 4:7.

### **Solomon's lessons about wisdom.**

The first 9 chapters of Proverbs contain a series of 13 lessons about wisdom. Most of the lessons are introduced by the words "*My son*" and the final lesson is given by wisdom herself. These lessons give us much insight into the wisdom of God, and practical insights in how to live God's way. Solomon himself didn't necessarily live in the way he describes, and he had to learn some of these lessons the hard way. Nevertheless, Solomon's lessons about wisdom can be invaluable in helping us to *attain wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, and knowledge and discretion to the young.* Proverbs 1:1:2-4.

**1. Avoiding evil. 1:8-33.** In this lesson we are encouraged to listen to the advice of our parents and be wary of those who would entice us towards evil. Wisdom says that we if we reject this advice we will pay the price. Conversely, those who listen to wisdom *will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.*

**2. Choosing wisdom. 2:1-22.** Wisdom comes from God. If we apply ourselves to wisdom and seek for insight and understanding we will *understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.* This will bring many benefits including victory in life, protection from evil, and understanding of the right way to live. Wisdom will save us from the ways of the wicked, including those who would seduce us to evil, and we will *walk in the ways of good people and keep to the paths of the righteous.*

**3. Trusting God. 3:1-10.** Living according to God's ways brings many blessings, but this requires us to *trust in the Lord with all our hearts, and lean not on our own understanding.* He will *direct our paths* if we *acknowledge Him in all our ways.*

**4. Accepting discipline. 3:11-20.** The Lord disciplines those He loves, as a loving father disciplines his children. Discipline is an ongoing theme throughout Proverbs. The Hebrew word for 'discipline' is *musar*. It can be translated as 'discipline', 'correction', 'chastening', 'warning'. Unfortunately this word has a slightly different meaning today with more emphasis on punishment e.g. by smacking. The original intent of 'discipline' throughout Proverbs is the loving correction and guidance that a father exercises to protect his children from harm. Wisdom and discipline are thus closely related. Those who accept discipline and follow wisdom *will be blessed.*

**5. Using common sense. 3:21-35.** Wisdom and common sense will help to keep us safe, and will guard us from getting involved in unwise actions. This gives a great sense of security leading to sound sleep, confidence, and honour in the sight of others. *The Lord will be your confidence.*

**6. Seeking wisdom and understanding. 4:1-9.** Here the teacher encourages us to *get wisdom, get understanding*, just like he had received from his father. If we earnestly seek these attributes they will protect us, bring us honour, and give us a sense of grace. *Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it costs you all you have, get understanding.*

**7. Keeping on the right path. 4:10-19.** We also need a strong determination to not walk in the ways of evil people. The path of the righteous shines brighter and brighter, but the path of the wicked is like *deep darkness*. Heeding this advice will protect us from evil consequences and bring us life and health.

**8. Guarding the heart. 4:20-27.** We are encouraged to make a priority of guarding our hearts. Above all, *guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life*. This involves choosing to do right and avoiding all kinds of evil in what we listen to, get involved in, look at and choose to walk in. It means being total committed to doing what is right.

**9. Maintaining sexual purity. 5:1-23.** The teacher now strongly describes the perils of adultery. He shows that the way to avoid the inevitable harm that comes from any kind of adulterous relationship is to have strong self-discipline, exercise discretion, keep well away from temptation, listen to the wisdom of leaders, be faithful, and have a strong relationship with your spouse. Doing this will mean you can *rejoice with the wife of your youth and be ever captivated by her love*. Our ways in this area are in full view of the Lord and He examines all of our paths.

**10. Not being foolish. 6:1-19.** In this lesson we are warned about foolish activities like making risky pledges, being lazy and being taken in by a *scoundrel and villain*. In each case the sensible thing to do is get out of the situation as quickly as possible. Solomon then lists *six things the Lord hates*: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that rush into evil, false witnesses and those who stir up dissension.

**11. Rejecting immoral relationships. 6:20-35.** Next is another lesson on immoral relationships. You will be protected if you follow the teaching of godly parents by not lusting after illicit sexual relationships. Those who fall in this area lack judgment and destroy themselves. They will also have to face the fury and revenge of other wounded parties.

**12. Keeping free of prostitution and adultery. 7:1-27.** This lesson gives a graphic description of the seductive ways of an adulteress. The pleasures she offers may be alluring but *her house is a highway to the grave leading down to the chambers of death*. Wisdom says to keep well away!

**13. Wisdom's appeal. 8:1–9:18.** Wisdom now speaks directly to us. Here *she takes her stand*. She wants us to *choose her instruction instead of silver; knowledge instead of gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her*. She wants what is best for us and counsels us *to hate evil, seek understanding, and walk in the ways of righteousness, and along the paths of justice*. Her ways lead to great blessing. The Lord established this wisdom right from the beginning and rejoices when His creation operates in this way. *Whoever finds me finds life and receives favour from the Lord*. Wisdom is like a generous hostess offering a banquet meal leading to a meaningful life, but only those who are wise will embrace this truth. *Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a wise man and he will add to his learning*.

Ultimately *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*. Those who know this will be wise and will have years added to their lives. Those who reject it and turn aside to the 'pleasures' of deception are *in the depths of the grave*.

***Let the wise listen and add to their learning. Proverbs 1:5.***